

From Amazon Warriors to Hobbits: Heightism and the Cultural “Staturization” of Identities,
Gender, and Sexuality

By

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the social processes of “staturization,” or the cultural aspect of human height, and marginalization that comprise heightism, or discrimination based on height. The symbolic meanings of height create social categories and organize multiple aspects of social life such as gender, sexuality, the economy, culture, identities, and interactions. This project reveals further dimensions of general research on human height, gender inequality, stigma, and symbolic boundaries missed by excluding the cultural meanings of human stature. Using interviews with 63 very short and very tall women and men, this dissertation describes the cultural logic of staturation as part of the daily experiences of the tall and short. Non-normally statured persons understand their difference as they try to use or adapt standardized material culture, including mass-produced material culture and the built environment, and encounter non-material culture that defines and reinforces our ideas about tallness and shortness. The interactional salience of height includes others’ constant comments about height that accumulate into “microaggressions” that ostracize the short and tall. This dissertation also examines the staturized habitus includes lines of action, or strategies for coping with staturation, and internalized dispositions, as the temperaments of short and tall women and men reflect their responses to the different expectations for tall and short people. Furthermore, the taller-man norm, the “personal preference” for taller men and shorter women, is a fundamental organizing principal of sexuality that naturalizes gender by individualizing the choice to have conforming relationships. Staturized gender includes different processes of bodily capital allocation for tall men, short men, tall women, and short women that result in typologies of gender and sexuality for each. Like other forms of inequality, heightism contains a social logic of discrimination, privilege, and naturalized distinctions between social categories of persons.

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For Chris

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION
STATURIZATION AND HEIGHTISM: SOCIAL MEANING-MAKING PROCESSES
AND THE BODY

“I wouldn’t say that my height has changed my life for the worse. It’s changed my life for the difference.” –Amber, 5’

Whether height affected their careers, relationships, or childhoods, the tallest and shortest women and men know their stature has a profound influence on their lives. Some have stories of squelched career dreams, such as Amber, 5’, who longed to be a helicopter pilot until she discovered military height requirements barred her from such an occupation. Others describe how height factors in relationship choices, daily lives, and identity formation. Tiffany, 4’11”, who said, “I’ve always identify myself as the short girl. My nickname in high school was Strawberry Shortcake because I had strawberry blonde hair. It’s just who I am. It’s the way I’ve always been.” Throughout the sixty-plus interviews I conducted about height and identity, I asked my research participants to tell me their earliest memory of being tall or short. Many recalled the exact moments they learned that they were extremely tall or short: hearing grandparents’ remarks about cousins’ growth spurts, returning to school several inches taller than their classmates, buying clothes in the children’s department long after peers graduated to juniors’, hitting their heads on overhangs previously out of the way. Others struggled to point to a specific instance when they developed an awareness of their height because they always remembered being different.

My earliest memory of being tall was at an amusement park game where the employee guessed players’ weights, heights, or ages—winners who stumped the guesser received a stuffed bear. I begged my parents to play, promising that their two dollars would not be wasted because the woman holding the microphone would never correctly guess my age. “Five years old,” she

announced. “No,” I happily replied, “I’m three.” I also remember the park employee’s disbelief as my parents insisted she was wrong while I collected my prize. Already vastly taller than my peers, I knew even at three years old that my height shaped how others perceived me. I was already a six-foot-tall female by the end of middle school, and I grew to 6’3” by the time I was a 16 year-old high school sophomore. Before I had the language of sociology to articulate my experience, my height allowed me to see how we made meanings about gender and difference in social interactions and the larger culture. These observations inspired the sociological investigation of tallness and shortness that is the focus of this dissertation.

We experience society as embodied individuals as our bodies influence culture and culture shapes our physical bodies and our understandings of them. Research on the body examines how cultural meanings emerge from the construction of the biological features of the body. Social constructionist conceptions of “the body” emphasize the cultural inscription of bodies and the materiality of bodies, which together express the appropriate or legitimated gender through symbolic markers of appearance. Scholarly interest in “the body” and the political-cultural of embodiment have increased in the last few decades, especially scholarly analyses of the meaning of body size (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003; Boero, 2007; Bordo 1993; Boyle, 2005; Brace-Govan, 2004; Bridges, 2009; Crosnoe, 2007; Crosnoe, Frank, and Mueller, 2008; Dworkin, 2001; Ferraro and Kelley-Moore, 2003; Gremillion, 2005; Lovejoy, 2001; Rich and Evans, 2005; Saguy 2013; Satinsky et al., 2013; Strings, 2015; Warin, Moore, and Davies, 2015; Yancey, Leslie, and Abel. 2006; Ziebland, Thorogood, Fuller, and Muir, 1996). Social constructionists theorize the body and society as mutually constitutive forces, problematizing purely biological-determinist assumptions about the consequences of embodiment. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, 851) argue that “the common social scientific reading of bodies as objects

of a process of social construction” needs to expand to consider “the interweaving of embodiment and social context.” The historical meanings of the body underscore the social constructionist approach to a cultural examination of the body. For example, Martin (1992, 134) finds that the historical shift from Fordism to late capitalism corresponded with a shift in understanding of the body, especially as the body gains multiplicity and complexity in meaning. The dialectic between material bodies and culture manifests in the historical distinctions in the meanings of the physical body. Gender sociologists grapple with how to reconcile constructionism with biological processes in a way that takes both seriously without slipping into essentialism (i.e., Kennelly, Merz, and Lorber 2001; Miller and Costello 2001; Udry 2000, 2001). Social constructionist analyses of the body problematize biological-determinist assumptions that ignore culture; and social constructionists theorize the body and society as mutually constitutive forces.

In this research I will be adopting a corporeal realist framework, which contends that the body is both a generator and site of culture, and that neither the body nor culture can be subsumed by the other. Corporeal realism incorporates the body and culture rather than supporting binary conceptions of body/society (Shilling 2005). Shilling (2005, 20) encourages sociologists to use a corporeal realist perspective so that they “can start with and concentrate on society as long as they do not analytically collapse what is physical, material and biological about the body with social structures.” Recently, sociologists have looked for ways in which to integrate an understanding of biology into sociological research (Freese 2008, S28; Freese, Li, and Wade 2003, 244). For example, the transmission process and treatment protocol of HIV/AIDS—events that involve biological processes—vary according to intersections of social structures of race, class, gender, and sexuality (Watkins-Hayes 2014). Social constructions of

bodies and cultural artefacts, such as technologies, influence how we experience our bodies in different contexts. In her research on amputees, Crawford (2015) notes that the shifting relational meaning of prosthetics indicates that “body image” is a process rather than a fixed state. Beynon-Jones (2015) describes how the discursive construction of pre-abortion ultrasound shaped women’s subjective experiences of pregnancy termination as a medical informational tool—rather than a more pervasive construction of fetal ultrasounds as instances of mother-baby bonding. Corporeal realism examines how physical bodies affect culture and social structures and how the social, in turn, affects bodies themselves and our conceptualizations of embodiment. Thus, sociological analysis of the body interrogates the medium through which we experience the social world.

In this introductory chapter, I first define two overarching themes that I develop throughout this dissertation: the concept of “staturization,” or the infusion of the symbolic meanings of height throughout culture and social life; and “heightism,” or the marginalization of non-normally statured persons. I then describe my data collection and analysis procedures, including a discussion of the relationship of my own positionality as a tall woman conducting research interviews about height. Finally, I outline the following chapters in this dissertation.

A SOCIAL PROCESS OF MARGINALIZATION: HEIGHTISM AND THE “STATURIZATION” OF CULTURE

“Staturization” and the Symbolic Meanings of Height

The symbolic meanings of tallness and shortness—from the obvious, like the expectation that tall people play basketball, to the implicit, such as the sitcom’s easy joke about the short character—influence many aspects of tall, short, and normally-statured individuals’ lives to the extent that we can identify social processes of “staturization.” Kruse (2002, 176) argues that the built environment is statured, or “designed by and for individuals of ‘average’ height...both physically (in terms of accessibility) and socially (in terms of reflecting cultural norms and

values suggested by those spaces).” He states, “The staturization of space reinforces the *dominant preference* for able bodies of average height” (183, emphasis added). I use the term *staturization* to refer to the prevalence of taken-for-granted symbolic meanings of tallness, shortness, and relative height difference throughout society. In this dissertation, I extend Kruse’s definition to examine the *staturization of culture*, which refers to the permeation of the symbolic meanings of tallness and shortness throughout social life—from tall as powerful, competent, regal and short as cute, childlike, or incompetent to the assumptions about abnormality of the tallest and shortest women and men as well as the ways that we assume bodies of average height in the design and production of material culture (and the representations of short and tall bodies that must interact with these artifacts differently).

The scope of diversity in human height may seem a superficial fact—some people are 5’7½”, others 6’4”, a few 4’9” or 7’2”—and the effects of a person’s height on their life—buying longer pants, using a stool in the kitchen—can appear as only the insignificant details of someone’s day-to-day. Yet the forceful emotional accounts of short and tall persons about the impact of height on their experiences, lives, and identities indicates that these events and interactions occur within a context where height means much more than inches and stepladders. Extremely tall and extremely short women and men report otherwise trivial situations as wrought with profound emotions relating to the connection between their experiences and connotations about tallness and shortness. Their emotional responses to the *meanings* of shortness and tallness demonstrate the potent symbolic boundaries around “normal” height. The intense emotions of very tall and very short men and women surrounding these meanings, what I term the “staturization of culture,” reveal how the virtually unchangeable characteristic of height creates distinctions between bodies so naturalized and taken-for-granted that we hardly notice this social

process. For example, the everyday object of shoes carried complex symbolic meanings about height for my participants, especially women. Both tall and short women lamented the dearth of women's footwear available in their sizes that relegated them to men's or children's departments, respectively, and ostracized them from this "normal" way of shopping and dressing for women. Shoes have particular symbolic resonance regarding staturization for my interviewees because they represent legitimated conventional gender and the increased difficulty of routine tasks for non-normally statured persons.

One defining characteristic of staturization is the naturalization of the symbolic meanings of height as genetically determined and permanent due to the immutability of tallness and shortness. Veronica, 5'10", explained, "Height is such an uncontrollable part of who we are physically. People talk about size, people talk about weight, people talk about appearance and things like that and there's a lot of stuff within that that is adaptable for good and for bad, and I think people try really hard and are taught to try really hard to control a lot of parts about who they are physically." Yet, Veronica explained, the available strategies for altering height are limited to shoes and posture (barring extreme and rare medical interventions). She continued, "You can sit up straight, slump over, whatever the case may be, but you cannot change how tall you are as a person and so it's a really interesting topic to think about that it's one of the few parts of our physical persona that is completely unchangeable." As I argue throughout this dissertation, the unalterable state of a person's height has significant ramifications for how he or she forms an identity in relation to others' perceptions. The fixedness of height also lends staturization its symbolic resonance because the symbolic meanings of height thus seem natural and preordained—as though our perceptions that tall men are powerful, for example, exist

because people have genetically-determined heights rather than from our cultural constructions of tallness and shortness.

As with other components of culture, we learn the symbolic meanings of tallness, shortness, and “normal.” For non-normally statured individuals, this learning often includes poignant moments of instruction or difference. For example, many tall women and men described the awareness of their difference when viewing their elementary school class photos because the tallest students are positioned in the center of the back row. Some recalled searching for tall and short leaders and celebrities or referencing the tallest and shortest persons as indicators of the scope of human height and their position within the scope of height variance. Jill, 6’2”, said that as a child, “I was really obsessed with reading the *Guinness Book of World Records* and I knew that I wasn’t going to be as tall as the people in there. That was the first thing I looked at after I realized that I was tall. I knew I wasn’t going to be like that guy who died really young because he kept on growing or like that woman who was 7’ tall.” These passages supplemented the daily interactional education Jill encountered about the meaning of her height that took subtler forms than the formal records of the tallest persons in the world.

Staturized cultural touchstones also directly or indirectly instruct on the meanings of shortness and tallness. These meanings are both historical and contextual. Charles, 6’3”, recounted the Biblical story of David and Goliath, emphasizing the height symbolism in their battle. He argued, “Reading the Bible and listening and Sunday school noticing the military the way it is in 2012, we’ve always in the military viewed height as an important part of being a good leader and being effective as a leader.” Additionally, staturization is a context-dependent cultural process in the United States. Sean, 5’5”, contrasted his experience of height studying abroad in Japan, where he “did not feel short because it was never brought up in that cultural

context,” versus attending a wedding with childhood friends in the U.S., where he “just felt totally freaking short” because of the significance of height in American culture. As components of culture, the symbolic meanings of height are context-dependent.

Heightism: The Body and Naturalized Inequality

Inequality based on stature remains one of the most legitimized and under-examined forms of inequality—both culturally and academically. In 1975, sociologist Saul D. Feldman argued that “American society is a society with a heightist premise: to be tall is to be good and to be short is to be stigmatized” (437). Legal scholar Isaac B. Rosenberg (2009, 909) defines heightism as “discrimination against a person on the basis of his or her height.” In this dissertation, I broaden this conception of heightism as outright discrimination to include not only the instances of discrimination and stigmatization that short and tall people certainly experience, which Feldman and Rosenberg articulate, as well as the preference for normally-statured bodies as designed into our built environments, described by Kruse (2002, 2003), but also to include the cultural determinism regarding staturized gender and identities. Regardless of whether they are tall or short, the salience of non-normally statured persons’ height, culturally and personally, creates marginalization, discrimination, and limitation. I define *heightism* as a process of inequality and discrimination based on physical stature, including (but not limited to) imagery of staturized culture, the design of social life assuming only normally statured bodies, prescriptions about individuals’ personalities based on their height, the disproportionate allotment of bodily capital based on gender-conforming heights, sexual boundaries and constructions of attractiveness defined by the taller-man norm, and staturized microaggressions against tall and short persons within daily interactions. This definition centers on illuminating the constraining power of staturization and the role of heightism in legitimizing and naturalizing difference.

Heightism remains under-defined if not unacknowledged because staturized culture is both ubiquitous and taken-for-granted, a doxic component of our interactions and identities. Some short and tall participants articulated their own definitions of heightism. Alexis, 4'8", objected that heightism is "dehumanizing if anything, just discriminatory and wrong." The expectations about tall and short people often results in the type of determinism that Alexis finds dehumanizing. Chelsea, 5', stated, "I think that heightism is just—I don't know—a predisposition about people's heights. I think heightism can be negative or positive, but a lot of people see it as negative." Although she explained that there are not often overt prohibitions or laws perpetuating heightism and "it's not like people have clubs that you can't get into because of your height," Chelsea maintained "that it exists." Chelsea pointed to two of the cultural components of heightism—imagery and perceptions—that define many tall and short persons' experiences as embodied violations of our expectations of "normal." She argued that heightism includes "what's expected of someone that you visualize being tall versus what's expected of someone who you visualize being small." The connotations of tallness and shortness include "an inherent feeling about both of those, like how someone who is small is weak and meek and maybe even submissive, and someone who is tall is dominant and aggressive and expected to be that way. And of course it's not true." Despite the inaccuracies of these generalizations, Chelsea maintained that the imagery of staturized culture limits our treatment of tall and short people in discriminatory ways.

RESEARCH METHODS

In order to understand the social and cultural aspects of height, this project focuses on the narratives of the very tall and very short. The tallest and shortest individuals are most likely to develop an awareness of how height impacts their lives, identities, and others' perceptions; therefore, they are the most relevant informants of how the symbolic meanings of height produce

social processes and mechanisms of division and inequality. In the U.S., the mean height for women is 5'4" (1.62 meters). Interviewees qualified as "short women" if they were 5'2" (1.57 meters) or shorter. Interviewees qualified as "tall women" if they were 5'10" (1.78 meters) or taller. The mean height for men is 5'9" (1.76 meters) in the U.S. Interviewees qualified as "short men" if they were 5'7" (1.7 meters) or shorter. Interviewees qualified as "tall men" if they were 6'2" (1.88 meters) or taller. These individuals are within the minority of tall and short heights, which differ for women and men. Among men in their twenties, 11.6% are 5'6" or shorter and 11.0% are 6'1" or taller; among women in their twenties, 12.3% are 5'1" or shorter and 9.7% are 5'8" or taller (U.S. Census Bureau 2012, 112). These parameters reflect the membership requirements of Tall Clubs International and the definition of short stature by the National Organization of Short Statured Adults, Inc. (now disbanded), which are height advocacy and social organizations.

Interviewees eagerly participated in this research project, and persons whom I was unable to include in this dissertation will be contacted for future research. This project includes 63 narratives conducted in fall of 2012: 18 interviews with short women, 21 interviews with tall women, 12 interviews with short men, and 13 interviews with tall men. (One participant removed himself from the study several months after the interview.) The following table presents the percentage breakdown of the demographics of the study participants.

Sex/Gender	38% <i>men</i>	62% <i>women</i>				
Height	46% <i>short</i>	54% <i>tall</i>				
Race/Ethnicity	5.5% <i>Asian</i>	5.5% <i>Black or African</i>	3% <i>Latino/a or Hispanic</i>	3% <i>multi-racial</i>	83% <i>White</i>	
Age	26% <i>18-24 years old</i>	46% <i>25-34 years old</i>	14% <i>35-44 years old</i>	8% <i>45-54 years old</i>	3% <i>55-64 years old</i>	3% <i>>65 years old</i>

Sexual Orientation (Self- Identified)	1.5% <i>bisexual</i> (1 participant)	94% <i>heterosexual</i>	1.5% <i>gay</i> <i>man</i> (1 participant)	1.5% <i>gay</i> <i>woman</i> (1 participant)	1.5% <i>lesbian</i> (1 participant)
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Recruitment included word-of-mouth and snowball sampling, posted flyers, and a posting on an anti-heightism website. One interviewee responded to the public flyer. Thirty-seven interviewees were referrals from word-of-mouth and snowball sampling. Twenty-six interviewees responded to the online posting (which the original blog author had reposted on the height-specific forums on the website Reddit). In-person interviews occurred in the surrounding areas of Lawrence, Kansas, and Kansas City, Missouri. Phone and online interviews involved participants in all geographic areas of the U.S. as well as Canada and Germany. Twenty-nine interviews occurred in-person, 16 interviews occurred via phone, and 18 interviews occurred using online video-conferencing software. Interviews were open-ended and lasted from 20 to 90 minutes. I asked questions about height and the interviewee's daily life, height in childhood and adolescence, and height in adulthood as well as questions about their opinions regarding the cultural meaning of height (for the Interview Schedule that guided these conversations, see Appendix A). These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using voice-recognition software. All in-person interviews signed an informed consent and confidentiality statement. I read an informed consent statement to all phone and video interviewees.

The following chapters include quotations from 30 interviews, which represent the themes present in all 63 interviews. I supplemented preset codes reflecting relevant concepts in literatures on gender, stigma, cultural sociology, and sociology of the body as well as those derived from my own experiences and expectations as a non-normally statured person with emergent codes as topics became important and patterned in the course of the interviews. The interview transcripts were hand-coded using the following codes: interview process;

interviewer's height; emotional response to height boundary; emotional response to strangers' comments; emotional response to idea of normal; emotional response to sexuality; perceptions of height and gender; gender advantages; gender disadvantages; practices to maximize gender advantages; limits on gender advantages; practices to minimize gender disadvantages; gender flexibility; height and personality; sense of constancy of comments; subject of jokes; humor; perspective of outsider; built environment trouble; salience of height; effect on career; cultural messages; situations otherwise inappropriate; and heightism. I then analyzed the connections in these statements to identify processes of how height affects identity, gender and sexuality, and interactions. These categorizations fit both the sociological scholarship relevant to this study and the experiences and important issues to my interviewees.

Finally, a note on the word "height": Although this is a common term used interchangeably with the word "height" by most persons (including participants in this project), it is a "nonstandard spelling of height" according to the most updated Random House Dictionary (Dictionary.com 2015). Therefore, I have exclusively used the word "height" in my prose and interviewees' statements for the sake of continuity and to eliminate any confusion about what these different words might connote.

NARRATING HEIGHT: THE (RESEARCHER'S) BODY IN INTERVIEWS

The participants in this project had particular interest in these interviews because height shapes so much of their lives yet few outlets provide an opportunity to discuss their experiences and views on the relationship between their stature and their identities. Many interviewees described the research process as "validating," such as Courtney, 6'1". Courtney was excited to participate because "I feel like my experience being a tall woman is something that is important to me and I'd like for my voice to be heard." Nicole, 4'10", agreed, "Most people know about that study about how height gets you hired, but nobody ever talks about what it's like being

short.” For some, these conversations were, as Ryan, 6’6”, described, about “just the life I live so being interviewed about it is just kind of like talking about what I had for dinner last week.”

Others were so accustomed to discussing their height with curious strangers that our interview recreated typical conversations participants were accustomed to having. Shane, 6’10”, said, “For the most part a lot of the questions you ask a lot of questions that most people ask so it kind of feels like I’ve done this before.” And yet some participants found the interview to include “some soul-searching,” according to Katherine, 5’1”. Katherine explained, “I complain about it obviously, but I never thought about my own journey through growing and being where I am. I feel like I had a little therapy session, a little ‘short girl therapy.’” Hannah, 4’10”, concurred that the interview included “these strange epiphanies that I wouldn’t be the person that I am today if I was taller or even average height.” For some, the connection of height to their lives and identities was a challenge to articulate. Alicia, 5’, described the difficulty articulating the daily influence of her shortness:

“It’s funny because I feel like I keep going back and forth between telling you that my height affects absolutely everything and that it’s not a big deal and really doesn’t make a difference to me because I think the differences that my height makes are tiny and numerous. I tell you it doesn’t really matter, but then I tell you I couldn’t possibly conceive of changing it. It’s odd, circular. I realize I keep contradicting myself.”

These interviews not only provided me with data to analyze for my dissertation but offered the interviewees a chance to voice their stories and examine their identities. Whether they found the process cathartic or riveting, the participants valued the interview process and communicated their interest and stakes in the research.

The intimate and personal nature of these interviews created its own challenges as interviewees navigated these conversations with their own feelings and reservations. The three female participants who mentioned sex acts prefaced their comments with asking me if it was a

subject I wanted to discuss. At the end of our interview in a coffee shop, I asked Veronica, 5'10", if there were any additional topics she wanted to discuss. She answered, "You know, I don't know if it's anything you can use, but sex. Do you want to move outside while we talk about that?" The delicateness of these interviews caused many short male participants nervousness about my intentions and views on short men. Brian, 5'4, asked me about my research agenda to ensure I would not be trying to prove negative stereotypes about short men. Austin, 5'5", recalled telling his friend, "'I have an interview about my diagnosis of dwarfism,' like this is a little extreme. I know I'm short, but why is that made out to be such a bad thing?" Austin explained that he later "realized maybe it's just basic questions. That's what it's turned out to be. I was making a joke out of it, like, 'Gosh, why is being short so bad?'" In this way, the meanings of height influenced the interview process because these conversations occurred within staturized contexts. Sean, 5'5", explained how the stigma against short men affects the interview process:

"The thing about being short, maybe for men anyway, is that you ask this set of questions to everyone and switch the word sometimes, and there is an implication or an automatic assumption that what you're asking has a negative slant. Even though you don't use the negative maybe: 'So how does being short affect your identity?' Automatically you think, 'Tell me all the negative ways.' It's not 'Oh I was short so I was the star of the wrestling team.' You don't really hear that as much. So I guess that does say something about height already that we up automatically expect a negative slant to the answers to these questions."

Considering the often negative stereotypes of extremely short and tall, some participants were hesitant to disclose these personal stories. Through the interview process, interviewees grew more comfortable as they asked about my motivations and my experiences. Height is more personal than a cursory examination would suggest because non-normal stature touches some of the most private aspects of people's lives.

Measuring Our Experiences: My Tall Body and Interviews on Height

I disclosed my own height in all interviews, whether in person or over the phone or Internet, for transparenance about my own perspective, background, and interest in the project. My

tallness often became a point of interest or reference for participants. Tall women interviewees acknowledged our mutual knowledge as we likely encountered many of the same experiences. Robin, 5'11", described strangers approaching her, adding, "I'm sure you get this—and I don't know your background, but you're taller than me—"Did you play basketball?" Courtney, 6'1", bemoaned the limited selection of size 13 women's shoes: "The really cute stuff stops at size 10. I'm sure you've noticed." Paul, 6'9", referenced the likeliness of our shared experiences of being tall in public when he stated, "I don't know if it happens with you, but it happens with me all the time." Multiple tall male interviewees asserted their affinity for tall women. Many participants carefully negotiated the common (presumably insulting) conflation of women's tallness and masculinity. Some tall women reassured me that I was not of masculine build, such as Rachel, 6':

Rachel: I am proportioned. Nobody looks at me and is like, "Damn she's got a long neck or her legs are super long." There's nothing super freakishly tall about me. Or so I tell myself. [Laughs.] Am I wrong?

Jane: I'm probably not the best arbiter of freakishly tall.

Rachel: No, you totally are too. I think you are. And you're *tall*. I look at you and think, "Damn, she's tall." But you're totally normal. You have small little hands.

Tall interviewees mentioned our shared frame of reference and experiences: shopping, airplanes, questions about basketball. But they also navigated the negative meanings of women's tallness by avoiding offending me or reassuring me that those stereotypes did not apply to me. Importantly, they did so without my intimation that I was either offended or concerned about those stereotypes.

My height had different implications during interviews with short participants, who often treated me as an informant on tallness. Some short women and men expected that we had similar experiences if opposite in some ways. When I asked Hannah, 4'10", if she would like to begin

the interview with any particular remarks, her response was: “Well, you’re really tall are you? You’re the opposite of me.” Dennis, 5’5”, said, “You being a tall woman, I’m sure you have lots of stories to tell of how that affected your personality. Someone will come up to you and say, ‘So do you play basketball?’ The same happens with little people, too. I think it impacts us all our life.” Brian, 5’4”, reported that people like to call him “Two Foot.” He ventured, “I’m sure you probably get that on the other end of the spectrum: they probably say you’re 9’6” and just giggle and have a great time.” Some short men and women asked me questions about my experiences as a tall woman. Sean, 5’5”, inquired, “What have you heard from people since you’re a tall woman and I’m not a tall woman?” Amy, 5’, said during the course of the interview that she was “saving myself from trying interview you because I’m like, ‘Oh 6’3”, that’s so cool.”” Like several participants, Amy asked about the height of my husband. When she learned that we were approximately the same height, she replied, “You’d be a cool couple to run into. When you met him were you like, ‘Sweet, he’s tall enough?’” Alongside the novelty of my height to short interviewees was the exposition in their stories of how my behaviors might replicate the height-based interpersonal power dynamics they described. For example, many short participants complained of taller people resting their arms atop the shorter person’s shoulders like an arm rest—an act I am sure I have done many times without considering that the gesture could insult my shorter friends.

The researcher always influences the interview process because the interviewer and participant co-construct the dialogue that scholars use as data. In the course of this research, my positionality and embodiment influenced the interview process in interesting ways because I was a tall woman conducting interviews about tallness and shortness. Certainly, my tallness caused some interviewees concern over my agenda—but ultimately my inclusion in the group

membership of “non-normally statured” persons legitimized me with my participants.

Furthermore, my femaleness provided me with an advantage regarding my credibility with interviewees that I believe would be unique to a tall woman researcher because I, seemingly, understood an aspect of each group’s experience: the constraints of femininity with short and tall women, the inconveniences of tallness with tall men and women, and the gender incongruity and stigmatization with short men. From these interviews, I also developed a newfound awareness of my own behaviors that might reify height-based power inequities in interpersonal interactions.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The following chapters examine the social processes of staturization and marginalization that comprise heightism. I argue that the symbolic meanings of height create social categories and organize multiple aspects of social life such as gender, sexuality, the economy, culture, identities, and interactions. The naturalization of the social dynamics of height renders the process of staturization invisible and often overlooked despite its cultural influence. In Chapter 2, “Defining ‘Normal’: Gender, Stigma, and Boundaries,” I review relevant literatures to my study on height. First, I provide an overview of research on height, primarily from disciplines outside of sociology. Next, I discuss cultural explanations of gender inequality that examine the cultural distinctions made between male and female bodies. This is particularly pertinent to the topic of height because our ideas about height differ for men and women and staturization reinforces essentialism that justifies gender inequality. I then turn to Erving Goffman’s work on stigma as an interactional and relational process. Like the other forms of bodily stigmatization I discuss, non-normally statured persons encounter interactional stigmatization and height-based boundary work. I argue that this project reveals further dimensions of each of these concepts missed by excluding the cultural meanings of human stature.

Next, in Chapter 3, “The Staturization of Everyday Life: The Symbolic Meanings of Height,” I begin my analysis of my interviews with non-normally statured persons. This chapter describes the cultural logic of staturization as part of the daily experiences of the tall and short. Non-normally statured persons understand their difference as they try to use or adapt standardized material culture. When very short and tall women and men try to shop for clothing—items of material culture with intense symbolic resonance for their personal identities—the dearth of available options signals their place outside the category of normal. The incompatibility of extremely tall and short bodies with the built environment signifies another staturized boundary as the design of public places and transportation assumes users within the parameters of normally-statured. Non-material culture also defines and reinforces our ideas about tallness and shortness. For example, height-based conceptions of professionalism privileges tall men as with preconceptions of competence. Staturized language reveals expectations about who tall and short women and men “should” be and the stereotypes against which they live. Jokes about height in particular indicate the symbolic import of staturization and serve to justify heightism—even when committed by non-normally statured persons themselves.

In Chapter 4, “The Staturized Self: Microaggressions and the Habitus,” I demonstrate the connection between interactions and the self for non-normally statured persons using Pierre Bourdieu’s idea of “the habitus.” The staturized habitus includes lines of action, or strategies for coping with staturization, and internalized dispositions, as the temperaments of short and tall women and men reflect their responses to the different expectations for tall and short people. Extremely short and tall people have intense emotional reactions to the staturization of their interactions because these incidents involve explicit and implicit boundary-work that marginalizes the non-normally statured. These interactions include “microaggressions,” a term

typically used to describe subtly and overtly racist statements against persons of color in daily interactions. The constancy of comments non-normally statured persons encounter as strangers and acquaintances remark on their height—casually or cruelly—are also microaggressions because these interactions ostracize the very short and the very tall. Dealing with staturized interactions and microaggressions as well as staturized culture creates an outsider perspective for short and tall people. I maintain that the experience of microaggressions characterizes the “staturized habitus” for non-normally statured persons.

Chapter 5, “Heightist Imagery of Desire: Staturized Typologies of Gender and Sexuality,” turns to the gendered meanings of tallness and shortness that naturalize gender inequality through the rhetoric of personal desire. I argue that the taller-man norm, the “personal preference” for taller men and shorter women, is a fundamental organizing principal of sexuality that naturalizes gender by individualizing the choice to have conforming relationships. I identify different processes of bodily capital allocation for tall men, short men, tall women, and short women that result in typologies of gender and sexuality for each. Taller men represent the fulfillment of masculinity and the ideal mate; short men face emasculating assumptions that relegate them to platonic status with many women. Height influences gender in more complicated ways for women. Short women receive advantages because they represent conventional femininity and desirability, yet this gender capital often backfires by exacerbating their access to forms of power denied to women because they appear hyperfeminine. Tall women struggle with the fetishization of their bodies that complicates their access to some forms of gender capital because they do not align with expectations for female bodies, yet the same incongruence grants them some access to typically masculine forms of power.

The concluding chapter, “Heightism and Embodied Inequality,” summarizes the arguments made in this dissertation by describing how staturization influenced the relationship of one couple who defied the taller-man norm. Andrea, 6’, and John, 5’5”, developed their own understandings of the meanings of their heights through years of encountering staturization. Their decision to date and the relationship and marriage that followed reflects the constraints of the taller-man norm even in nonconforming couples. In this chapter, I also explain how heightism operates like other forms of inequality. Like other forms of inequality, heightism contains a social logic of discrimination, privilege, and naturalized distinctions between social categories of persons. My hope for this study is increased cultural awareness of staturization as a cultural process in order dismantle the structural limitations that limit the choices and expressions of non-normally statured persons and whom they—we—love and form relationships and families.

CHAPTER 2

DEFINING “NORMAL”: GENDER, STIGMA, AND BOUNDARIES

The experience of height is of utmost salience for height-stigmatized individuals. Like many forms of stigma, height may seem trivial to those for whom it is not a daily determinant of interaction and self-understanding, and the discreteness of height renders these standards and meanings part of the taken-for-grantedness of our daily lives. Many of us, even of average stature, can predict some of the staturized experiences of height-stigmatized women and men: scarce prom dates, enthusiastic or dismissive basketball coaches, and playground and hallway nicknames. Height stigma, or the interactional experience of non-normative stature as part of a gendered self, influences most social occurrences, thus encouraging extremely short and extremely tall men and women to employ strategies to present a normal self. As persons' tallness or shortness becomes meaningful in relation to others, height also indicates how stigma contributes to and reinforces boundary-work between bodies.

Stigmatization refers to the marginalization of individuals based a discrediting trait. Goffman ([1963] 1986, 3) defines stigma as characteristics “which are incongruous with our stereotype of what a given type of individual should be. The term stigma, then, will be used to refer to an attribute that is deeply discrediting, but it should be seen that a language of relationships, not attributes, is really needed. An attribute that stigmatizes one type of possessor can confirm the usualness of another, and therefore is neither creditable nor discreditable as a thing in itself.” Short and tall individuals' height has meaning in proximity to others' smaller or larger bodies; thus, height stigma is not about the *attribute* of shortness or tallness (or our presumptions about who short or tall people are) but the *relational meaning* of those categories. As height-stigmatized individuals become aware of the salience of their stature—an experience of which persons of “normal” height have the privilege of ignorance—through verbal instruction

on the meaning of their height and as they intuit others' discomfort, very tall and very short men and women witness the micro-level enforcement of macro-level gender norms. My dissertation research analyzes these narratives. Furthermore, this project compares the experiences of men and women whose tallness and shortness have myriad gendered implications. In this way, this project also examines how individuals craft gender identities and constructions of normal selves when their bodies exceed gendered height thresholds past our conception of normal as well as when their bodies do not fit with social expectations for men and women. In other words, because the embodiment of masculinity assumes tallness and largeness in general, how extremely tall men deal with their appearance of hypermasculinity—as individuals who surpass this marker of masculinity and simultaneously standards of normal height—is equally as interesting as how short men “compensate.” Short women may represent hyperfemininity, and their strategies to maximize or minimize these perceptions indicate as much about the meanings of height and gender as tall women's efforts to convey more femininity.

In this chapter, I explore the linkages between four literatures that show the importance of a sociological study of human height: I begin with a review scholarly research on height, largely from outside the discipline of sociology. I then summarize how cultural gender scholars theorize gender inequality as a problem of ignoring how culture shapes our understandings of the body through naturalization and biologicalization. The cultural logic of gender mirrors the symbolic meanings of height, and each informs the other. Second, I present Goffman's interactional concept of stigmatization and body-size normalization strategies. Next, I explore how non-normally abled, racialized, and queer bodies demonstrate processes of defining embodied symbolic boundaries. In conclusion, I argue that the immutability of stature has sociological and political significance for each of these literatures by revealing an unexamined

yet crucial component in the processes of gender essentialization, boundary-making (particularly regarding sexuality), and embodied inequality.

RESEARCHING HEIGHT

Personality Research on Height

Although height has served as a variable in numerous studies, the social construction of height and how people cope with height stigma remains unexamined. Research on human height primarily focuses on height distributions, human mating patterns, character traits, and stereotypes. For example, demographers examine the relationship between nutritional and health inequality and height distributions (A'Hearn, Peracchi, and Vecchi 2009; Alter 2004).

Evolutionary perspectives emphasize the reproductive success of tall and average-height men and average-height women (i.e., Buunk et al. 2008; Pierce 1996; Stulp et al. 2012). Economic studies indicate the increased earnings and career benefits of tallness, such as the campaign advantage of tall politicians (Judge and Cable 2004; Sorokowski 2010). Personality research links height with problematic traits: psychological research has found that taller adolescents are more likely to use multiple drugs and are more likely to have antisocial behaviors (Barnes, Boutwell, and Beaver 2012; Ishikawa et al. 2001). Deady and Smith (2006) argue that taller, and therefore “masculinized” women prioritize careers over motherhood and exhibit a less maternal personality. Bogaert and McCreary (2011) found that the men in their study over-reported their height, and short men provided more exaggerated measurements (see also Ziebland et al. 1996). Finally, stereotype research finds that shortness results in less favorable perceptions of men, more so than for women, and that tall women appear dominant (Boyson, Pryor, and Butler 1999; Jackson and Ervin 1992). However, this body of research does not examine how very short and very tall individuals deal with the facticity of their bodies in light of the socially constructed meanings of height and gender.

The Standardization of Height

Most physical settings privilege average height. The meaning of genetic difference and historical boundaries that define normal height for men and women reinforce gender inequality by minimalizing height-stigmatized individuals' access to legitimated gender and by emphasizing the importance of gender compliance for individuals of all heights. Czerniawski (2007, 289) argues that the life insurance industry's height and weight "tables, as instruments of power, established a system of classification, differentiating those who fit the ideal from those deemed unfit, and became part of the medical literature for years to come." Height and weight tables exemplify historically shifting standards for bodies, but those standards differ for men and women. These standards manifest in the built environment, as evidenced by the gendered experiences of dwarfism and space (Kruse 2003) and the medicalization of treatment for tall girls and short boys (Cosgrove and Cohen 2009; Rayner, Peyett and Astbury 2010). The gendered significance of height fluctuates historically alongside social and cultural shifts, especially in gender relations. Lee and Howell (2006, 1038) explain that the medical profession's concern with height shifted from the practice of treating tall girls with estrogen, which was predominant in the 1940s through the 1960s yet still occurs, to the present treatment of short boys with Human Growth Hormone. The predicted height requirements for the treatment of tall girls was five-foot-nine-inches in 1956, five-foot-eleven-inches in 1977, and six-foot-two inches in 1999 (Lee and Howell 1038). The definition of "normal" and the process of normalization changed because tallness and shortness are context-dependent designations. Although the cutoff for what was considered extreme tallness for girls may have loosened, extreme tallness and extreme shortness retain significance as markers of embodied stigma. The conspicuousness of height stigma subjects dwarf women, for example, to public embarrassment as strangers comment and inquire about their height (Kruse 2003, 500). These interactions demonstrate the fluctuating but

intact boundaries of normal height. Height-based discrimination occurs both interpersonally and often tacitly. The interpersonal benefits and disadvantages based on height reflect cultural assumptions about competency and maturity (Persico, Postlewaite, and Silverman 2004). These assumptions carry specific standards of normal height that not only delineate stigmatized from normal bodies but also reflect the historical arrangement of symbolic power.

Gender-Deviant Bodies

Along with standards of weight and fat, standards for women and men's height stigmatize very tall and very short men and women as gender-deviant bodies. Deviant height, among other forms of embodied deviance, constitutes a "congenital" stigma sign (Goffman [1963] 1986, 46). Goffman (1979, 28) argued that the arrangement of male and female models in advertisements reflected the gendered power dynamics of society, explaining why men and boys were taller or higher than the women and girls in the photograph. Normal height signals the embodiment of legitimated gender, or, in other words, height deviance signals gender deviance. Height-based discrimination can occur both interpersonally and tacitly. Persico, Postlewaite, and Silverman (2004) found that teen height matters more than adult in a height wage differential because the taller teens were treated as older and, thus, had more opportunities for advancement and training. The interpersonal benefits and disadvantages based on height reflect cultural assumptions about competency and maturity. Additionally, these assumptions carry specific standards of normal height that not only delineate deviant from nondeviant bodies but also reflect the historical arrangement of symbolic power. The staturized built environment is another way of establishing the boundary of normal height against very tall and very short women and men. The meaning of genetic difference and historical boundaries that define normal height for men and women reinforce gender inequality by minimalizing height-deviant individuals' access to legitimated gender and by emphasizing the importance of gender compliance for individuals of all heights.

Men and women's embodied deviance from height norms alters and shifts the potency of gender markers. For example, very short and very tall men and women have limited access to the clothes that signify legitimated gender (Jones and Giddings 2010). Additionally, the meaning of height and height deviance manifests differently for women and men. In their analysis of height and workplace authority using data from the Canadian General Social Survey, Gawley, Perks, and Curtis (2009, 220) found that height was a stronger signifier of power for men. Carballo-Diéguez et. al. (2004, 163) identify height as a marker of masculinity for Latino gay and bisexual men who use a relational measure of masculinity to determine who will take the insertive or receptive role in oral and anal sex. Carballo-Diéguez et. al. explain that the determinants of masculinity include "the individual appearing more macho, more aggressive, taller, endowed with a bigger penis, more handsome, or darker" (166). However, hyper-conformity may accompany assumptions of hypermasculinity and hyperfemininity that ensnare particularly very short women and very tall men. Kruse (2003, 499) explains that the women in his study of dwarfism and gender expressed that reactions to their struggles in the built environment "reinforces both traditional perceptions of women's limitations and common attitudes towards physical disability....These women also relayed experiences where they are viewed as personifying 'cute' and 'girlish' femininity even though some are well into their middle age and find such perceptions insulting." Thus, the backlash of perceived hyperconformity limits the expression and interpretation to such categories. Embodied deviance colors signifiers of gender conformity—such as cuteness for women and power for men—as well as nonconformity—such as assertiveness for women and gentleness for men—as those signifiers gain and lose salience and change in meaning in combination with bodily stigma, especially when the stigma so closely relates to gender.

The Sociological Perspective on Height

Evolutionary research on human stature holds height as a variable without interrogating the cultural symbolism of tallness and shortness or the practices of non-normally statured persons in light of the meanings of their bodies. Thus, the cultural logic of staturized “mating patterns” and personalities remains untheorized without a sociological perspective on the naturalization of gender, stigma, and symbolic boundaries. This research broaches psychological and cultural perspectives by describing the content of the symbolism of tallness and shortness through the narratives of non-normally statured persons in order to disrupt the biological-determinist assumptions regarding height. In doing so, I argue that height illuminates contemporary mechanics of gender essentialism and the role of stigma in embodied boundary-work.

NATURALIZED DIFFERENCE: GENDER INEQUALITY

Naturalized Categories as the Basis of Gender Inequality

Sociology of the body has particular relevance for disrupting gender inequality because the naturalization of masculinity, femininity, and patriarchy rests on the *meanings* of differences between bodies in the categories of “women” and “men.” Sociological work on gender includes both an analytical deconstruction of the categories “woman” and “man” and a political interest in ending gender inequality, often through revealing and dismantling the social structure of gender. Since Susan Bordo’s publication of *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* in 1993, social science interest in the body has increased, as exemplified in the recent formation of the Body and Embodiment Section of the American Sociological Association in 2009. These studies emphasize the active role in culture to attribute meaning to human bodies. For example, de Casanova (2013) argues that uniforms represent the embodiment of inequality between domestic workers in urban Ecuador because they mark the wearer’s occupational status on the body. Social constructionist conceptions of “the body” emphasize the cultural inscription

of bodies and the materiality of bodies, which together express the appropriate or socially legitimated gender. At the most basic level of gender stratification, divisions between men and women rest upon differences of anatomical sex. The social organization of men and women within a stratified gender system—or systems—is one of the most naturalized and enduring social structures (Epstein 2007, 3). Difference has significant meaning in intersecting yet distinct structures of inequality. As many scholars have explained, the gender divide is connected with and intersects with race and class (Baca Zinn and Dill 1996; Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1991). Queer theorists and feminist biologists, such as Butler (1993, 2004) and Fausto-Sterling (2000, 2005), critique the categories of sex and gender and biology's neglect of the role of culture in biological processes. The diversity in academic explanations and conceptualizations of gender demonstrates the multifaceted nature of gender inequality. Gender scholars have examined gender inequality from historical, macro, and micro-level perspectives, and crucial to all of these is the body. MacKinnon (1993) traces gender inequality to the centrality of men's sexual desires that legitimate sexual violence, as enacted and represented in the protected speech of pornography. Micro-level studies of gender inequality examine themes such as the domestic labor (Hochschild [1989] 2003) and girls' developmental psychology (Brown and Gilligan 1992). Furthermore, seemingly basic means of bodily survival—eating—occur within social contexts that obligate women to provide meals for their family as expressions of love rather than labor (DeVault 1991). The perpetuation of gender inequality relies upon bodily difference and the cultural meanings and enforcement of those differences.

Throughout this dissertation, I argue that staturization uniquely illuminates the border of cultural inscription and bodies because height is virtually unalterable. This is particularly relevant to interrogation of structural gender inequality because the biologicalization of gender

statuses halts much political advocacy. Foucault (1976) argued that contemporary claims about sexuality (the “repressive hypothesis”) replace the very explanation of natural sexuality (as procreative, heterosexual, etc.) with another explanation of natural sexuality. These structures manifest in an individual’s bodily hexis, which Bourdieu (2004, 476) explains, is “a basic dimension of one’s sense of social orientation.” We use our bodies to communicate with others but also as a representation of our position in social structures. Inequality persists through processes of stigmatization of bodies and the normalization of bodily deviance. The political import of the body includes everyday meanings and as well as an examination of the body in social movements, in which the body can be both a symbol and a political issue (Sasson-Levy and Rapoport 2003, 398). Social constructionist sociologists, especially feminist gender scholars, argue that essentialist conceptions of the body underestimate culture and ignore the power relations that biological determinism supports. The terms “sex” and “gender” address the biological and cultural components of our construction of gender, but this interplay requires further interrogation (Smith 2009, 76). Witz (2000) argues that the sociology of the body cannot lose the analytic and political advantages of the concept of gender. The categories of “sex” and “gender” represent how the meaning of bodies is culturally created in order to sustain, and sometimes disrupt, social structures that rely upon naturalized distinctions between bodies. Gender inequality, for example, persists partially because essentialist claims endure as we use ideas of biology to justify them (regardless of the scientific accuracy of those claims).

Embodied Difference: Negotiating “Normal” Gender

Embodied difference distinguishes between and among male and female bodies through standards of normal and ideal. In addition to the foundation of appropriate anatomy, the embodiment of gender necessitates a physicality of masculinity and femininity. Connell ([1995] 2005, 52-53) explains, “Masculine gender is (among other things) a certain feel to the skin,

certain muscular shapes and tensions, certain postures and ways of moving, certain possibilities in sex. Bodily experience is often central in memories of our own lives, and thus in our understanding of who and what we are.” Structural gender inequality (of and about different bodies) manifests at the levels of institutions, culture, and individuals (Epstein 1993, 232; Lorber 1993, 569; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999, 192; Risman 2004, 433). The power within the naturalization of these categories reifies binaries without reference to difference within these categories. Steven Epstein (2004, 198) interrogates the introduction and contestation of demographic categories in medical research, such as sex/gender and race, and the debate over their bearing on medical treatment. Lorber (1996, 146) encourages scholars to examine the variation within the designations of “men” and “women.” Because gender inequality, among other forms of inequality, depends upon the distinctions of embodied difference, those categories matter politically and empirically. Gender inequality requires a cultural preoccupation with embodied difference and a hierarchy of different bodies. The divisions between tall, short, and normally-statured bodies rests upon the same fascination with reading and inscribing personal characteristics according to bodily difference. These social processes reinforce each other as shortness and tallness have gendered meanings that, simultaneously, affirm the naturalization of masculinity and femininity.

The diversity in academic explanations and conceptualizations of gender demonstrates the multifaceted nature of gender inequality. Studying “the body” provides one avenue into uncovering the cultural logic of the naturalization of gender inequality as individuals strive to present legitimated forms of masculinity and femininity in relation to their bodies. Bodies that more easily align with ideas of masculinity and femininity have a symbolic advantage regarding “gender capital.” Bridges (2009) explains that individual bodybuilders try to embody hegemonic

masculinity through physicality within interactional evaluations of culturally-inscribed bodies. Because the attainment and embodiment of hegemonic masculinity is largely impossible for any individual, Bridges argues, individuals adhere to gender practices in order to attempt to realize hegemonic masculinity. Bridges' interviews reveal that bodybuilders have different relationships with gender capital in and out of the gym; their gender capital translates to some situations (bouncing) but seems contrived in others. Bridges argues, "Gender capital allows us to discuss the ways in which some things count as masculine or feminine for some, but not for others, in some situations and not in others.... Domination, subordination, marginalization and complicity remain paramount in discussions of gender capital" (93). The valuation of gendered bodies reflects symbolic economies in other structural, institutional, and cultural areas of social life, or "fields." Martin and George (2006) describe "a specifically sexual field with a bodily capital that is not wholly indexical (i.e., that has no value in itself, but merely points to the value of the person in some other social space), but—to the extent that the field is autonomous—has its own genetic logic" (126). People in different fields have different valuations of attractiveness, and, therefore, different people would be considered attractive in different fields.

The expectation of bodily difference between men and women requires distinct gendered standards for evaluating women and men's bodies. Male bodies' designation of physical and social power provides some men with the symbolic asset of the body as representative of legitimated gender (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 279). Signifiers of legitimated masculinity include, for example, alignment with classed ideals of fitness and rejection of homosexuality and femininity. Consumerist encouragement of men's bodily insecurity results in a "branded masculinity" that utilizes products to communicate fitness, fashion, and success (Alexander 2003, 551). The heterosexist language and behavior within displays of masculinity separates men

who wish to prove their heterosexuality as distinct from homosexual men (Kimmel 1994). The feminine standards for bodies center on attractiveness and weight, as discussed in Bordo's (1993, 46) analysis of "the *meaning* of the ideal of slenderness" for Western women. The meaning of gendered bodies as manifested in the proliferation of depictions of nude women provides more cultural scripts for viewing female nudes than are available male nudes (Eck 2003). As women's status and power often depends on the appearance of bodily purity, embodied morality can often only be communicated through othering women who can be connected with signifiers of bodily deviance, such as nonwhite women (Fields 2005), the classed categorization of rape victims as "good" or "bad" victims (Phipps 2009, 678), and girl gang members' distinctions against promiscuous members (Schalet et. al 2003). In addition to having less access to these bodily markers, deviant bodies prevent or reduce the access to legitimated gender.

Appearance, Gender Markers, and Clothing

In making choices about their appearance, individuals select from discrete ways of embodying versions of masculinity and femininity, locating the individual in systems of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. Huisman and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2005, 54) explain how clothing represented the complexities of identity for Bosnian Muslim immigrant women living in Vermont as the women maintained elements of Bosnian dress practices and incorporated Western styles that signified modernity and Western femininity. White middle-class men's participation in feminine-coded beauty practices signifies their embodiment of white middle-class masculinity through fulfilling the hygiene and style requirements of their social location (Barber 2008, 456). In addition to subversive possibilities of fashion, clothing often reaffirms structural inequality within meaning-rich rituals, especially the white bridal gown, which contributes to the "heterogendered" and racially white wedding (Ingraham 1999, 19). Appearance norms carry racial meanings, often reserving the ability to meet standards of

appearance for middle-class whites. For example, the meaning of Black women's hair shifted from straightening hair as "an embodied project of upward mobility" in pre-Civil Rights to the Afro as "a new symbol of racial pride" (Leeds Craig 2006, 171). Leeds Craig argues, "Claiming beauty was a risky yet necessary strategy for black women, who as women and as blacks were already seen primarily as bodies" (174). Additionally, school administrators' raced and classed perceptions of minority students' low cultural capital increase the pressure of bodily discipline to meet white middle-class norms of dress practices (Morris 2005). Thus, white privilege may excuse white students (and, likely, white persons outside of school settings) from meeting standards of neatness. Symbolic markers of appearance can communicate social identity to others as well as serve as reinforcements of gender, class, and race structures.

Individuals can communicate their own bodily conformity and detect embodied deviance in others through symbolic markers of appearance. Appearance can demonstrate embodied gender and correct perceived bodily shortcomings of masculinity and femininity through the portrayal of the self in relation to gendered bodily standards (Clarke and Griffin 2007; Gagné and McGaughey 2002; Gimlin 2002). In making choices about their appearance, individuals select from discrete ways of embodying versions of masculinity and femininity, locating the individual in systems of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity (Barber 2008; Huisman and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2005; Ingraham 1999; Leeds Craig 2006; Morris 2005). Clothing assists in creating a gendered appearance, but the presentation of legitimated gender requires knowledge of and access to the symbols that denote masculinity and femininity (Bettie 2003, 62; Crane 2000; Williams, Alvarez, and Hauck 2002). Symbolic gender markers and particular bodily forms can provide bodily capital for women and men. Appearance—clothing, makeup, hygiene, style—can demonstrate embodied gender and correct perceived bodily shortcomings of masculinity and

femininity. Schrock, Reid, and Boyd (2005, 324) state, “Clothing is more than a gendered text; it helps transform the physical body into a gendered vessel.” Through the symbolic markers of appearance, people can communicate that they embody the appropriate gender as expressed through clothing and style. Clothing assists in creating a gendered appearance, and clothing may hold some potential for subverting the construction of masculine and feminine appearance. Crane (2000, 16) explains that fashion is a tool for identity formation and the expression and construction of gender ideologies, including their potential for subversion through their subtle communication of meaning (237). Fashion includes the contexts of manufacturing, distribution, aesthetics, and popularity of clothing and appearance (Aspers and Godart 2013). The presentation of legitimated gender requires knowledge of and access to the symbols that denote masculinity and femininity. Bettie (2003, 62) explains that physical markers such as hair, clothing, and makeup styles are critical in the high school symbolic economy (see also Williams, Alvarez, and Hauck 2002). To enter into this symbolic economy of style, individuals must be able to access its markers—particularly, the clothes, shoes, and other objects must be available for their bodies. Accommodation to appearance norms, Weitz (2001, 683) argues, “offers women (and any other subordinate group) a far more reliable and safer route to power, even if that power is limited,” whereas resistance to appearance norms “is most feasible when individuals can count on other sources of power and status unrelated to appearance.” Thus, clothing can minimize some of the visible signifiers of deviance through deemphasizing the stigma signs *and* communicating legitimated gender. However, clothing strategies of normalization may nonetheless represent the stigma, such as short men’s elevated shoes (Goffman [1963] 1986, 92). Through clothing, individuals can communicate femininity and masculinity in particular versions that reframe their bodily stigma.

STIGMATIZED BODIES

Goffman and "Stigma"

Stigmatization is a distinguishing, boundary-creating and -enforcing process between certain types of bodies. Stigmatized individuals, like "normals," understand themselves through social interactions, but the salience of stigma signs in interactions contributes to constructions of the self that emphasize stigma. Goffman ([1963] 1986, 138) explains, "The normal and the stigmatized are not persons but rather perspectives." A particular form of stigma, or some discrediting characteristic such as ugliness or disfigurement, comes to have meaning as through interactions. Goffman states:

The information, as well as the sign through which it is conveyed, is reflexive and embodied; that is, it is conveyed by the very person it is about, and conveyed through bodily expression in the immediate presence of those who receive the expression. Information possessing all of these properties I will here call 'social.' Some signs that convey social information may be frequently and steadily available, and routinely sought and received; these signs may be called 'symbols.' The social information conveyed by any particular symbol may merely confirm what other signs tell us about the individual, filling out our image of him in a redundant and unproblematic way. ([1963] 1986, 43)

Both through the stigmatized individual's behavior reflects the presence of the discrediting characteristic as well as others' responses, the body affects how interactions proceed. Because individuals create the self through interactions, the stigmatized self results from the accumulation of interactions shaped by embodied stigma; the self, stigma, and interactions are embodied social processes. Stigmatized individuals monitor the interactional significance of their stigma largely because they accept hegemonic standards of normalcy and the normal self. Goffman ([1963] 1986, 32) explains, "One phase of this socialization process is that through which the stigmatized person learns and incorporates the standpoint of the normal, acquiring thereby the identity beliefs of the wider society and a general idea of what it would be like to possess a particular stigma." The consequences of such internalization are twofold: first, the stigmatized individual uses

strategies to pass or minimize the stigma symbol in interactions, and, second, the stigma becomes part of the stigmatized individual's understand of the self.

Bodily Stigmatization and "Embodied Deviance"

Processes of bodily stigmatization illuminate how corporeal differences have significant cultural meanings that translate into forms of and justifications for gender inequality. Stigmatized bodies represent an "embodied deviance" from context-specific norms, including standards of femininity, masculinity, sexual propriety, ability, and attractiveness (Urla and Terry 1995, 2). Although complete conformity to all cultural standards for individuals is nearly impossible, most normally-appearing people can pass in most situations. The stigmatization of bodies involves a process of "social selection of human differences when it comes to identifying differences that will matter socially" (Link and Phelan 2001, 367). The behaviors and bodies that constitute embodied stigma shift for different identity categories as well as how particular categories intersect with situational contexts (Cahill and Eggleston 1995, 695). Normalization of stigmatized bodies—which includes myriad strategies to approximate a legitimated version of masculinity and femininity—can minimize the salience of stigma through modified physical appearance, contexts that prize or at least deemphasize the particular bodily stigma, or challenging the meaning of the stigma itself. Through appearance work, individuals can communicate femininity and masculinity in particular versions that counterbalance their bodily stigma. How and to what degree these strategies of normalization succeed on individual and cultural levels are important questions for studies of stigmatized bodies.

The Stigmatization of Obese Bodies: The Moralization of Race and Class

Obesity represents a peculiar variant of embodied stigma through its cultural connection with individual morality and medicalization in addition to the increased risk of health problems. Deviant physical size involves several aspects of normative standards of weight, height, and

fitness for men and women. In particular, rhetoric framing obesity as an epidemic and the individualization of obesity as a “personal failure” involves moral judgments that misrepresent the scientific relationship between weight and health (Saguy 2013). The North American Association for the Study of Obesity established a Weight Bias Task Force in 2004 to address the stigmatization and discrimination of obese individuals in the realms of employment, education, and healthcare (“Weight Bias Task Force” 2005). Bordo explains that obese persons are “disturbing partly because they embody resistance to cultural norms” (2003). Yet Satinsky et al. (2013) found that women of size who had low body image reported lower sexual health and satisfaction, but larger women with healthy body image had healthier and happier sex lives—despite breaking cultural norms of weight. Additionally, obesity’s connection with the class structure in the United States suggests that the stigmatization of fat obfuscates American economic inequality. Ferraro and Kelley-Moore (2003, 708) argue that the long-term health effects of obesity can be traced to childhood class disadvantage (see also Yancey, Leslie, and Abel 2006). The medicalization of rising obesity rates places moral values on fatness and thinness and on fat and thin individuals (Boero 2007; Rich and Evans 2005). In addition to potential health risks, obese individuals confront social disadvantage as their bodily stigma shapes interactions. One way that women and girls endure gender inequality is through the primacy of their appearance over all other individual qualities. Crosnoe (2007, 241) argues “the social stigma of obesity” for girls “triggers psychological and behavioral responses that interfere with college matriculation, especially in contexts...in which the stigma of obesity is most likely to be felt,” such as schools with low rates of obesity in girls. The social stigma of nonconforming bodies directly influenced girls’ access to cultural capital and upward mobility. Furthermore, adolescent obesity decreases the likelihood of peer friendships, especially for girls (Crosnoe,

Frank, and Mueller 2008). Within the framework of corporeal realism, which holds that the body shapes culture and culture influences the body, the stigmatization of obesity illuminates the difficulty in delineating physical health risks and social constructions of bodies as well as the importance of considering their interaction.

Scholarly analyses of body size, especially examinations of fatness and muscularity, reveal the gendered meanings of largeness and smallness, including the moralization of the “choice” of body size. Bodily ideals for men center on muscular largeness. Different expectations of muscularity for women and men stigmatize very muscular women and less muscular men and also naturalize gendered differences of physical strength. Largeness without muscle falls short of the ideal male body, which should display a culturally-defined appropriate level of muscularity (Hennen 2005; Messner 2007). Male bodies’ association with physical and social power provides some men with the symbolic asset of the body as representative of legitimated gender (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 279). However, women’s exercise typically focuses on the reduction of body size, as the presence of women’s muscularity challenges conceptions of power, bodily size, and attractiveness (Boyle 2005; Brace-Govan 2004; Dworkin 2001; Hollander 2002; Leeds Craig and Liberti 2007; McGrath and Chananie-Hill 2009). Furthermore, standards of fitness and thinness reflect the stigmatization of obesity as an individual’s moral failure. In addition to potential health risks, obese individuals confront social disadvantage as their bodily stigma shapes interactions (Boero 2007; Crosnoe 2007; Crosnoe, Frank, and Mueller 2008; Rich and Evans 2005). Obesity’s connection with the class structure in the United States suggests that the stigmatization of fat obfuscates American economic inequality (Ferraro and Kelley-Moore 2003, 708; Yancey, Leslie, and Abel 2006). Saguy (2013) maintains that in addition to intersecting with other forms of inequality, particularly class and

race, body size constitutes its own form of inequality because the dominant framing of fatness as problematic (versus other frames promoted by fat activists).

Non-normal bodily size involves several aspects of normative standards of weight, height, and fitness for men and women, and obesity in particular involves moral judgments conflated with ideas about class and race. Racialized meanings of fatness intensify the health disparity as obesity parallels other structures of inequality (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2003; Lovejoy 2001; Thompson 1992). Racialized meanings of fatness intensify the health disparity as obesity parallels other structures of inequality. Magubane (2001) argues that scholarly analysis of Sarah Baartmann (the “Hottentot Venus”) failed to acknowledge the historically shifting meanings of race and Blackness and the multiple interpretations of her body by contemporaries, such through the lenses of individualism and property. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2003, 116) argues that the cultural image of the strong black woman, or “discourses of strength and deviance,” obscures the oppression of black women as “embodied manifestations of the contradictory distinction of being strong and powerless like a mule.” Strings (2015, 108) classifies the descriptions of obese black women as lazy and unhealthy as “are the latest innovation in the familiar medical trope of the unrestrained black woman as deadly.” A viable explanation for Black women’s lower rates of body-image problems could be a liberating conception of attractiveness in which differences in the meanings of femininity decrease the pressure to be thin, but may also ignore the potential health problems of overeating and obesity (Lovejoy 2001, 241). Furthermore, eating disorders may be one strategy to cope with trauma and the experience of racism, classism, sexism, and other experiences of oppression (Thompson 1992). Through the racialization of obesity, the stigmatization of fat bodies exacerbates health inequality.

Body Size and “Body Work”: Normalizing Stigma

Altering the body through everyday choices of appearance, more deliberate designs of exercise routines, and surgical intervention changes the portrayal of the self in relation to gendered bodily standards. Technologies of “body work,” from aerobics to makeup to mammoplasty, enable women to alter their body, which communicates a more conformant self (Gagné and McGaughey 2002; Gimlin 2002) through body work appearing natural (Clarke and Griffin 2007). Gimlin (2002, 6) states, “Body work is in fact work on the self. By engaging in body work, women are able to negotiate normative identities by diminishing their personal responsibility for a body that fails to meet cultural mandates.” Body work can create an image of a particular race, class, and gender identity. Although much of body work alters the body to approximate ideals of masculinity and femininity, some modification seeks to undermine the ideals of appearance norms. Pitts (2000, 450) argues that the contention around physical modification, such as tattoos, brands, and scarring, asks whether such practices challenge dominant appearance norms although participants view the acts “as a socially contentious, ironic practice, an expression of defiance in the face of normalizing forces.” Johnston and Taylor (2008) argue that typical challenges to standards of beauty often only offer a modified standard rather than eradicating standards themselves.

Muscularity represents one aspect of body size in which men and women navigate different processes stigmatization with gendered rules and meanings. Expectations of muscularity for women and men stigmatize very muscular women and less muscular men and naturalize gendered differences of physical strength. Messner (2007, 475) argues that the contemporary incarnation of hegemonic masculinity maintains important elements of traditional masculinity, as “muscle must first and foremost be evident,” with sensitivity, compassion, and vulnerability “displayed at appropriate symbolic moments.” However, largeness without muscle

falls short of the ideal male body. For example, the Bear role within gay culture demonstrates both the stigmatization of fatness for gay men and the effort to normalize deviant bodies through the deployment of a particular version of rugged masculinity (Hennen 2005, 29). Because the larger male physique is naturalized in Bear culture, Hennen argues, “the perceived naturalness of the Bear body may be extended to naturalized understandings of sex practices that are increasingly compliant with norms of hegemonic masculinity” (41). In *The Adonis Complex*, Pope, Phillips, and Olivardia (2000, 85) argue that men’s “bigorexia” signifies the how the rise of “muscle dysmorphia,” or a compulsive desire to become more muscular, suggests an increased pressure on all men and boys to be bigger. The subcultural affirmation of the hegemonic ideal of the large male evidences that bodies matter for men, albeit how gender and privilege connect are different than for women.

Women’s exercise typically focuses on the reduction of body size, as the presence of women’s muscularity challenges conceptions of power, bodily size, and attractiveness. Masculinized gym spaces combine with cultural expectations of women’s bodies to perpetuate the invisibility of women’s weightlifting (Brace-Govan 2004). Women-only gyms’ encourage smaller bodies and conventional femininity through their exercise routines, design and corporate processes, and focus on cardiovascular (Leeds Craig and Liberti 2007, 679). Although the “glass ceiling” of women’s athleticism has increased over time, women who do not wish to cross the cultural threshold of tolerance for women’s muscularity and fitness may readjust their workouts to maintain bodies that remain within the parameters of femininity through a “conscious negotiation with a historically produced upper limit on strength and size” (Dworkin 2001, 345). Muscles suggest physical power, which threatens the presentation of feminine vulnerability and, therefore, feminine desirability (Hollander 2002, 482). The gendered meanings of muscularity

reveal cultural justification of aggression and violence in men and vulnerability in women (McCaughey 1998, 279). Therefore, other symbolic signifiers of conventional femininity—such as lipstick or motherhood—normalizes women’s muscularity. Although women bodybuilders may choose to have and be deviant bodies, they nonetheless often normalize their bodies by relying upon some markers of femininity (Boyle 2005). McGrath and Chananie-Hill (2009, 250) explain that women bodybuilders challenge normative femininity through their presence in the gym and their musculature, but they also conform to femininity because “in the world of bodybuilding, it is insufficient for a woman to be *only* muscular or *only* feminine—she must be *both/and*.” Women’s muscularity disrupts norms of feminine body size, but the stigma of women’s largeness requires a counteracting display of femininity.

Because particular sports require particular body types as well as abilities, some sports can normalize certain forms of bodily deviance, although athletes often rely on markers of gender conformity to address the accentuation of bodily stigma from their very participation. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibited sex discrimination by federally-funded education institutions and their athletic programs, has resulted in \$372 million each year to women’s college sports despite that an estimated 80% of schools and colleges are not in compliance, according to the Women’s Sports Foundation (“Title IX Facts”). The increasing presence of women in sports and women’s organized sport, including the attendant changes of women athlete’s muscularity, is neither absolute progress nor reactionary (Messner [1998] 2007, 43). The changing cultural standards of gender in the last few decades have meant that people express shifting and nuanced ideas of constructionism and essentialism. Messner and Bozada-Deas (2009, 68-69) argue that the culture of youth sports has transition from a “hard essentialism,” or a belief that boys and men were naturally inclined to play sports whereas girls

and women were not, to a “soft essentialism,” in which boys and men are still naturally athletic and competitive and girls and women are exploring potential paths. Although sport may provide a normalizing context, athletics—and a cultural emphasis on fitness—can encourage unhealthy practices such as, for example, steroid use (Miller et. al. 2002). The character of sport and its goal of winning can deemphasize bodily deviance in exchange for athletic success (Anderson 2002, 875). Anderson argues that the openly gay athletes’ talent and success may have prevented them from “perceiv[ing] the discourse of ‘fag’ as pertaining to them because they approximated many of the mandates of hegemonic masculinity through their athleticism” (873). However, sport can reify structural inequality, especially for amateur athletes. For example, black male students with lower cultural capital are more likely to play basketball and football, and participation in those sports are more likely to associate with lower academic performance (Eitle and Eitle 2002). Yet the potential of sport to normalize deviant bodies—through valuing bodily largeness in the context of athletics, for example—also carries the potential of creating another stigma symbol. Goffman ([1963] 1986, 94) argues, “Another strategy of those who pass is to present the signs of their stigmatized failing as signs of another attribute, one that is less significantly a stigma.” Therefore, large women’s basketball shoes or small men’s gymnastics equipment may represent status during training and competition but can be another signifier of deviance after the competition ends.

Women’s sport organizations and women athletes constantly prove their embodiment of femininity alongside their bodily deviance as competitive and strong women in order to maintain access to legitimated gender. Dworkin and Wachs argue that these strategies react to “the feared masculinization of women’s bodies that has long come with certain sport and fitness activities (especially weight lifting)” (621). McDonald’s (2002, 382) analysis of the Women’s National

Basketball Association (WNBA) framed athlete Suzie McConnell Serio's body as normally feminine to neutralize the threat of the WNBA and its competitive and strong athletes. Female athletes themselves have to reconcile their participation in sport with an image of proper femininity. Adams, Schmike, and Franklin (2005, 23) explain that girl athletes may "resort to the apologetic defense, which requires them to prove that their gendered identity trumps their athletic identity" through "feminine markers," such as makeup and hair ribbons, that establish femininity while performing masculine athletic acts. However, most of the female athletes rejected those feminine markers because they trivialized their athletic ability, and so they tried to find an identity such as the "tomboy" (Adams, Schmitke, and Franklin 29). The tomboy symbolically balanced conformance to femininity to excuse a degree of nonconformance. Similarly, Adams and Bettis (2003) argued that cheerleading as a touchstone of ideal girlhood immunized participants from accusations of masculinity and lesbianism despite their athletic talent and competition. The iconic symbol of cheerleader negated the pressure to compensate for the nonconforming bodily acts of aggression, strength, and competition. Adams and Bettis explain, "Unlike other athletes, these girls are participating in an activity that remains firmly entrenched within a feminine discourse; thus they do not have to veil their masculinity nor worry, like other athletes, about being stigmatized as too masculine or as lesbians" (84). Women and girls' athletic competition widens the definition of femininity and the meanings of the female body, yet the pressure to compensate with feminine markers demonstrates that bodily deviance must be justified as complying with a legitimated femininity. Ezzell (2009, 112) found that women college rugby players' identities embraced the competitiveness of the sport, but confronted (hetero)sexism from peers. Through "defensive othering," the women rugby players managed their claim to an athletic identity through othering more masculine players and

asserting the dominance of men's play (Ezzell 115-116). Additionally, certain female bodies are funneled into certain sports; in the case of height, cheerleading attracts petite girls whereas sports like basketball recruits tall girls, and the differences in the meanings of these sports have implications for how the athletes denote femininity. These studies invite further inquiry into what *types* of bodies have access to these potentially expanded femininities and masculinities and what types of bodies are too deviant to compensate.

Medical interventions related to stigmatized bodies attempt to correct the stigma sign in order to correct the deviant self. The difference of power assigned to male and female bodies can determine how medical professionals construct men and women's bodily experiences. Kempner (2006, 650) argues that the construction of the cluster headache as a hypermasculine condition unique to men perpetuates the dismissal of women's medical complaints by dismissing women's similar symptoms. Physicians and medical staff encourage anorexic patients to overcome their bodies in order to achieve a standard of fitness (Gremillion 2002). Cosmetic surgery, such as mammoplasty, is one of the "technologies of beauty available to women" that facilitates an approximation of embodied conventional femininity (Gagné and McGaughey 2002, 824). Davis (1995, 169) repositions the focus on cosmetic surgery from beauty work to identity work, emphasizing that identity is an embodied process. Cosmetic surgery, Davis (1995, 114) found, was a strategy that enabled some women "to move from a passive acceptance of herself as nothing but a body to the position of a subject who acts upon the world in and through her body." In defining what types of anti-aging body work stay within the realm of "natural," women may distinguish between surgical and more "natural" nonsurgical strategies (Clarke and Griffin 2007, 198). When men have cosmetic surgery, however, the operation itself represents deviance rather than a step in a common aging experience for women. In her analysis of television programming

on cosmetic surgery and medical textbooks, Davis (2002, 58) found that plastic surgeons, who are usually men, dislike male patients who demonstrate a concern with appearance that disrupts the surgeons' rational masculinity. When men have cosmetic surgery, the procedure represents a stigma in itself—in the bodily signs of the surgery, in the decision itself to have cosmetic surgery—rather than a strategy to normalize deviance, despite the individual's subjective motivation. For example, the medical industry's deployment of dichotomous genders as an organizing framework shapes professionals' responses to bodily deviance. Cosmetic surgery—like surgery to alter intersex genitalia—corrects often unthreatening conditions that nonetheless signify bodily deviance (Fausto-Sterling 2000). Preves (2002, 524) argues that surgical modification of intersex individuals' genitals pathologizes intersex as nonconforming to the gender binary. Medical and popular narratives of intersexuality naturalize dichotomous genders (Hausman 2000). Medical responses to intersexuality, as well as aging and other forms of embodied deviance, replicate standards of bodies and binary genders.

Height Stigma

Sociologists have examined how obesity represents deviant body size, but the personal-choice rhetoric regarding fatness creates a different process of stigmatization than for non-normally statured bodies that are unalterably tall or short. This project adds to general research on height by showing the importance of stigma in the interactional meanings of human stature. It contributes to sociological scholarship on stigma by examining how height and the body create distinctions between normally- and non-normally statured persons. Height stigma is not only the discrediting characteristic of non-normal stature but also the relational negotiation of what height means interactionally. A non-normally statured person's tallness or shortness may be more or less pronounced depending on the relative height of other people's bodies; thus, height stigma can influence interactions differently depending on the individuals' height composition.

BOUNDARIES BETWEEN BODIES

Symbolic Boundaries and the Body

The designation or achievement of “normal” justifies and naturalizes many symbolic boundaries between groups of people categorized by their bodies. Because disability remains a form of biologicalized difference, feminist disability studies “aims to denaturalize disability” by analyzing the ways in which the stigmatization of bodies reveal social power dynamics (Garland-Thomson 2005, 1557). Furthermore, these definitions shape how disabled individuals understand their own subjectivities (Marks 1999). Disability studies, especially feminist disability studies, examines how “abnormal” bodies cannot access markers of social acceptance privy to “normal” bodies. Garland-Thompson explains, “Bodies whose looks or comportment depart from social expectations—ones categorized as visually abnormal—are targets for profound discrimination” (1579). Gerschick (2000, 1264) argues, “The bodies of people with disabilities make them vulnerable to being denied recognition as women and men.” Arguably, individuals with many types of embodied stigma experience this same disjuncture between their bodies and social construction of normalcy. Ideas of normalcy and the body have a long-lived correlation as each serves to define the other in much of history, from conceptions of the normally-abled body to the properly sexual body. As Foucault (1976) explains, our ideas about “normal” and “deviant” sexuality shifted throughout history. Currently, those boundaries are contested and codified in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the mental health diagnostic handbook (de Block and Adriaens 2013). Historically-specific sexual identities emerge as practices and identities take new meanings, such as the increased awareness of asexuality as a sexual orientation (Gupta 2015). Sexuality intersects with other social structures, revealing how these structures operate in conjunction with desire and bodies (Gamson and Moone 2004, 60). Sexual boundaries often reinforce other group boundaries, such as nation-states and ethnicities

(Nagel 2000). Existing research on varied forms of embodied stigma elucidate the specific cultural mechanisms of the stigmatization of bodies, which supports varied manifestations of social inequality.

Sexual and Racial Boundaries

Research on the stigmatization of nonwhite, (non)reproductive, and queer bodies demonstrates how processes of stigmatization uphold middle-class white heterosexual privilege. The classed embodiment of gender distinguishes among femininities and masculinities through sometimes amorphous and sometimes blatant boundaries of raced, classed, and gendered bodies (Bourgois and Schonberg, 2009; Fields 2005; Trautner 2005; Wilkins 2004). The racialization of sexual morality as indicative of embodied morality upholds race, gender, and class boundaries. For example, nineteenth-century reproductive politics centered on the cultural definition of racial bodies and anxiety over Anglo-Saxon racial reproduction (Beisel and Kay 2004, 515). The stigmatization of black men and women as hypersexual maintain white privilege through policing ethnosexual boundaries, justifying the lynchings of black men in U.S. history as retribution against black “rapists” regardless of the alleged crime (Collins 2004; Donovan 2006; Hodes 1993; Nagel 2003). In response to the hypersexualization of black bodies, and the attendant threat of violence to punish dehumanized black men and women, scholars identify black women and men’s strategies to establish alternative identities of respectability. Black women’s clubs in the early to mid-twentieth century responded to Black women’s vulnerability to sexual assault by claiming some aspects of middle-class respectability (and the tenuous protection that it might provide) “in return for their sacrifice of sexual expression” (Hine 1997, 438). The black men in Duneier’s (1992, 66) urban ethnography made distinctions between practices of less respectable men and their own practices to communicate who lived “a mode of life embodying conceptions of moral worth.” The moral connotation within the

hypersexualization of black women and men creates a powerful stigma that reinforces structural racism that intersects with constructions of gender.

Furthermore, the hypersexualization of contemporary black women and girls upholds the “wholesomeness” of white women and girls and reifies sexual boundaries of race, gender, and class. Fields (2005) argues that the racialized language in community debates on sex education characterizes black girls as hypersexualized others who could corrupt “pure” white girls. The image of proper sexual bodies and conduct for women and girls supports white privilege. Wilkins (2004, 119) explains that classmates de-race white girls who fail to embody white sexual purity, reducing the salience of the “wannabes” racial privilege in peer interactions. The classed embodiment of gender distinguishes among femininities and masculinities through further discrete and blatant boundaries of raced, classed, and gendered bodies. For example, as exotic dancers embody different fantasies depending on whether the strip club is marketed at working- or middle-class clientele, the appearance and performance of exotic dancers and their interactions with customers denoted a particular classed sexuality (Trautner 2005, 786). Bourgois and Schonberg’s (2009) ethnography of Bay Area homeless heroin addicts bodies demonstrate the consequences of a personal but highly social act of drug use as heroin users create communities, and which also occurs within the context of structural racism and housing policies. Embodiment communicates conformity and deviance to class, race, and gender norms as well as the arrangement of power in those structures and their intersections.

Heterosexual Privilege: Sexual Orientation and Sexual Boundaries

The stigmatization of bodies that fail to meet gendered standards demonstrate the symbolic organization of gender through their transgressions. Furthermore, because queer and transgendered individuals represent outright nonconformance to heterosexual norms of gender and sexuality, the stigmatization of queer and transgendered bodies reveal how gender

nonconformity is one form of embodied stigma with often severe penalties (Green 2007; Halberstam 1998; Schrock, Reid, and Boyd 2005; Valocchi 2005). Gay men earn less than straight men in the same occupations (Waite and Denier 2015). The Human Rights Campaign reports that 17% of reported hate crimes are based on sexual orientation, the third highest hate-crime motivator after race and religion (Marzullo and Libman 2009, 5). The deliberate adoption of particular gender markers by queer and transgendered individuals—and the negotiation of privilege attached to specific markers of masculine and feminine appearance and style—demonstrates that doing gender is both performative and “compensatory” (Dozier 2005, 305; see also Schilt 2006). Because few can fully embody “normal,” many individuals outside—and many within—middle-class white heterosexuality experience the interactional sanctions of stigma.

Queer and transgendered individuals represent outright nonconformance to heterosexual norms of gender and sexuality, therefore, the stigmatization of queer and transgendered bodies reveal the penalties for embodied deviance and how gender nonconformity signals embodied deviance. Queer bodies, especially transgendered bodies, represent embodied deviance by “failing” naturalized notions of gender and sexuality. Queer theory and the concept of performativity complicate simple connections between sex, gender, sexuality, and identity (Valocchi 2005), and can extend sociological deconstruction in an analysis of the self (Green 2007, 43). Although gender-deviant individuals face sanctions for their nonconformity, queer identities, for example, may provide access to masculinity for women (Halberstam 1998). Shapiro (2007, 251) argues that not just the bodily performance of drag kinging but the process of participating in drag communities may also function as a form of consciousness raising and a site of identity transformation for performers. Analyses of the experiences of transmen and

transwomen in particular emphasize the embodiment of subjectivity. Schrock, Reid, and Boyd (2005, 328) argue that transgendered men and women demonstrate the inseparable connection between the body and subjectivity, as, for example, transwomen undergoing cosmetic laser hair removal “could not ignore the existence of biological facts, and changing their corporeal selves was clearly intertwined with subjectivity.” Transmen may have some post-transition access to male privilege—or at least find that peers no longer sanction masculine characteristics—in the workplace (Schilt 2006, 482). However, this new privilege intersects with other structures of privilege such as race and class as well as with the degree to which transmen’s bodies fulfill expectations of height and size for men (Schilt 485). The translation of some dominant heteronormative gender markers, such as hair removal or breast implants, “is not an imitation of heterosexuality as much as a participation in the available gender system to which all people are exposed” (Crawley 2001, 193). From her interviews with transwomen, Dozier’s concludes, “Doing gender involves a balance of both doing sex and performing masculinity and femininity. When there is no confusion or ambiguity in the sex performance, individuals are able to have more diverse expressions of masculinity and femininity” (314). The stigmatization of queer bodies suggests that doing gender requires a particular physicality along with particular behaviors, and other embodiments of gender translate as deviance.

(Non)Reproductive Bodies: Perceptions of Normal Reproductive Functioning

The significance of sexual reproduction—or the ability to reproduce—for proper male and female bodies stigmatizes non-reproductive bodies, including aging men and women. Children’s sex education books, Moore (2003, 293) argues, anthropomorphize sperm and eggs and disembodied reproduction through narratives that reinforce hierarchical gender distinctions in which men are the stronger and faster category (see also Martin 1991). The importance of these narratives suggests the symbolic weight of perceived reproductive ability for embodying

legitimated gender. Medical and popular obsession with men's sexual function, too, scrutinizes men's bodies for proper sexual function, especially in aging, as symbolized by "proper" and "normal" erections and sperm (Marshall and Katz 2002; Moore 2003). For aging men, the appearance of the ability to reproduce maintains bodily gender conformity. Marshall and Katz (2002, 63) explain, "Masculinity remains anchored in the erect penis across the lifecourse, and that functional penis remains the visible indicator of interior character and successful living." The functioning of reproductive organs communicates gender conformity against the stigma of "failed" reproductive organs as embodied deviance against gender norms. For example, Elson (2003, 759) argued that women who had partial or complete surgical removal of reproductive organs normalized their identity as women through a "hormonal hierarchy" in which women distinguished between women who had more or less organs removed. Shifting cultural meanings of gender and reproduction and the availability of contraceptive practices to stop reproduction earlier in life may reduce the stigma of menopause for some women (Dillaway 2005). The signal of the cessation of reproductive capability through the removal of reproductive organs or menopause denotes a deficiency in the embodiment of femininity. The preoccupation with the biological changes of menopause ignores some aspects of women's experience, including how those experiences may differ for heterosexual and lesbian women (Winterich 2003, 640). Aging is a problem for men and women because of the threat of the loss of the ability to reproduce as a form of embodied deviance.

Although motherhood represents one fulfillment of embodied femininity, pregnant bodies do not align with the ideal for women's appearance and breastfeeding as a maternal practice situationally represents embodied deviance, leaving maternal bodies simultaneously praised and stigmatized. Pregnancy and motherhood accompany changes in the body and identity; pregnant

women's sense of self shifts along with the physical changes throughout the pregnancy (Bailey 2001). For many women, motherhood provides the status of fulfillment of maternal femininity, as Luker (1984) explains in her discussion of "pro-life" women activists who opposed abortion in an attempt to prevent the devaluation of their role as mothers. Yet one paradox within traditional femininity prizes women's gender accomplishment as mothers while sanctioning the appearance of pregnant and mothering bodies. Dworkin and Wachs (2004, 611) state, "Exactly at the moment when a woman's body is accomplishing a highly valued route to femininity, she is least likely to be viewed as aesthetically ideal." The postpartum body faces particular scrutiny because of its largeness and lactation. Fox and Neiterman (2015) explain that women have complicated feelings about their post-partum largeness, depending on whether they conceptualized the changes to their bodies as temporary or permanent. Mothers felt their bodies were less compatible with professional appearance standards, but often motherhood provided some degree of freedom from chasing beauty ideals. Breastfeeding provides another example of how women negotiate the fulfillment of motherhood and the stigma of public breastfeeding. Hausman (2007, 491) argues that despite government and media campaigns promoting breastfeeding, the stigma of public breastfeeding—and of breastfeeding women as problematic embodiment—discourages many women from the practice as "the norm of autonomous personhood" is distinguished from a "maternal embodiment, figured most prominently through breastfeeding." Additionally, the medical and expert literature on parenting co-creates the act and meaning of breastfeeding (Wall 2001, 593). Although breastfeeding signifies women's fulfillment of motherhood—especially "good" motherhood—the sexualization of women's breasts creates a conflict for breastfeeding women, who have to negotiate this mutual fulfillment and transgression of femininity through vigilant discretion, especially in public (Stearns 1999,

321). Even as women accomplish motherhood as a component of femininity, the stigmatization of maternal bodies as non-attractive penalizes women who are mothers.

Staturization: Gender, Stigma, and Boundaries

General research on height has sought to catalogue preconceptions about the traits of short and tall people yet neglects the cultural meanings of height and the stories of non-normally statured persons. Scholarship on the sociology of gender theorizes how the naturalization of body difference justifies inequality, but how height legitimates gender essentialism remains unexamined. The biological-determinist process of naturalization shapes both height stigma and staturized boundaries. I argue that staturization, the infusion of the symbolic meanings of height throughout culture and social life, connects and expands literatures on gender, stigma, and symbolic boundaries. Height represents a taken-for-granted degree of naturalization of gender inequality, and accompanies different rules of stigmatization for men and women. Tallness and shortness have gendered meanings and designate symbolic boundaries between normal- and non-normally statured persons with unique logics for tall and short women and men. The stigmatization of height coincides with staturized boundary work as persons designate their difference in subtle and blatant ways.

CONCLUSION

The symbolic meanings of height and heightism intersect with gender as each reinforces the naturalization of the other. Tall and short persons' bodies are also male and female bodies, further naturalized as gendered bodies by the essentializing forces of staturized gender. With the correlation of masculinity and femininity with taller and shorter bodies, respectively, extremely tall and short men face expectations and perceptions regarding their gender identities and performances. The inability of most individuals to "choose" their height complicates easy associations of woman/small and man/large. Short and tall men and women must negotiate the

gendered meanings of height because body size symbolizes their “innate” accomplishment of gender. In the following chapters, I will show how the symbolic meanings of tallness and shortness play an unexamined role in essentializing gender and sexuality.

As separate from the normal range of height, non-normally statured persons navigate height stigma in their daily interactions; yet unlike many forms of stigma about bodily size, such as fatness, they cannot alter their height without grave medical intervention. The relationship of the very tall and the very short to the category of “normal” has intense importance for their daily lives, as they encounter the staturized boundary around normal height. The symbolic meanings of stature and the objective differences in sizes between persons shape individuals’ lives, even if normally-statured persons may be unaware, remains unexamined by social scientists. Because the symbolic meanings of height and staturization are such taken-for-granted parts of daily life, the narratives of non-normally statured persons can illuminate discrete processes of stigmatization. Yet the very short and the very tall have more complicated experiences of height than stigma alone—and their stories reveal how stigma accompanies cultural and relational difference-making.

Stigmatization is one form of creating and enforcing boundaries between bodies as the normal and non-normal relationally negotiate these categories. Non-normal stature includes experiences in many facets of daily life and identity formation beyond its intersections with gender. This dissertation focuses on the stories of non-normally-statured individuals and examines the boundary work between the normally statured and non-normally statured as well as between the tall and short. “Non-normal” height is a relative designation as the very short and very tall become aware of their difference through interactions and proximity to other bodies. Keeping with the tradition of sociology of the body, I assume that the body and culture are

mutually-constituting as the physical body—in this case, height—provides the foundation for culture and that, simultaneously, culture gives meaning to physical bodies as the symbolic meanings of height create staturized culture. In the following chapters, I argue that staturization and heightism are social and cultural processes in their own right, with their own logics of bodily capital and inequality, that shape identities, interactions, sexuality, gender, and most other components of personal and social life for the extremely tall and short.

CHAPTER 3

THE STATURIZATION OF EVERYDAY LIFE: THE SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF HEIGHT

Imagery about tallness and shortness abounds in our cultural repertoire from Amazons and the Fifty-Foot Woman to Hobbits and Napoleon. Non-normally statured characters and celebrities endure scripted and unscripted ridicule onscreen and in tabloid coverage. In an *XOJane* article, Jessica Liese (2013) asserted that media representations of tall women are exclusively thin and sanction tall women who are not thin, such as in jokes questioning the sex of reality television star Khloe Kardashian. Liese celebrates the *Game of Thrones* character Brienne of Tarth, a warrior who stands head-and-shoulders above other characters in the scenes in the HBO adaptation of the books. However, Liese asserts that the series author, George R. R. Martin, “makes a point of mentioning how ugly she is every time she appears, much of which is attributed to her size. Men joke about her appearance constantly, and when [another character] Jaime Lannister is legitimately attracted to her, he's ashamed.” The musical dramedy *Glee* introduced the character Shannon Bieste in 2010 as a female coach of the boys’ football team. The 6’3” actress Dot-Marie Jones plays “The Bieste” (pronounced “beast”), who consumes entire chickens in the faculty room, has never been kissed before her arrival, and eventually comes out as wanting to transition into a man (Gomez 2015). In her article “Isn’t He Lovely: Short Man Stigma,” Cristen Conger (2011) argues that we stigmatize short celebrities such as Danny DeVito, Nicolas Sarkozy, and Tom Cruise. Most film and television representation of characters suggest that non-normally statured persons do not exist, and that most men are on the taller side of average. The onscreen glorification of tall and large men is most obvious in superhero adaptations of comic books. For example, the Marvel character Thor, a Nordic god played by 6’3” actor Chris Hemsworth, is portrayed as much larger in proportion to his costars.

(Conversely, Liese argues that female characters from supposedly taller races, such as the Amazons Xena the Warrior Princess and Wonder Woman, are shot as smaller than their male costars.) Media representation presents one form of staturized culture as through conveying the meanings of tallness and shortness and the boundaries between the normally and non-normally staturated.

The categories of normally-statured versus non-normally statured (and the designations of “short” and “tall”) remain unexamined as social divisions, yet profound if subtle emotion and boundary-work establishes symbolic boundaries between these groups. Lamont (1995, 350) explains, “Symbolic boundaries are mental maps through which individuals define ‘us’ and ‘them,’ simultaneously identifying the most salient principles of classification and identification that are operating behind these definitions.” Extremely tall and short persons learn they are outside the category of normal through boundary work, and normally-statured persons can identify the very short and the very tall as “not us.” The emotions that both normally- and non-normally statured persons feel regarding these designations indicates staturized boundaries. Emotions and feeling rules are not neutral cultural facts but differ between races and classes and designate tensions between privileged and oppressed groups (Barbalet 1992; Hochschild 1979; Smith 2002; Wingfield 2010). Hochschild (1989, 191) argued that gender ideologies produce certain “feeling rules” about how people “should” feel about their marriages and families. Men and women encounter different expectations about how they should feel and how they should express and discuss those feelings (Goldschmidt and Weller 2000; Lively 2008). The emotion work that individuals enact to align their actual felt emotions with feeling rules (Hochschild 1979). We can see the erection of staturized boundaries through non-normally statured individuals’ intense reaction to symbolically significant cultural artifacts, such as shoes.

In this chapter, I discuss four areas of staturized culture: First, I argue that the design of material culture maintains staturized boundaries by othering the very tall and the very short. I then discuss staturized perceptions of individuals' competency and power that presumes tall men are the most competent leaders. Next, I examine how language shapes the symbolic meanings of height, including the generalizations and evaluations of short and tall individuals. Height-based humor is a specific instance of staturization that illustrates the cultural logic of heightism as individuals joke about height. In conclusion, I argue that material and nonmaterial culture represent sites of staturized boundary work that maintain heightism.

WE DON'T CARRY THAT SIZE: MASS-PRODUCTION AND STATURIZED BOUNDARIES

The Meanings of Clothing and Shoes: Why Non-Normally Statured Persons Hate Shopping

Clothing is a specific example of how staturized culture impacts the daily lives of tall and short persons and how they utilized staturized practices and strategies that normally-statured persons do not have to resort. The simplest act—getting dressed—is a daily challenge for the shortest and tallest men and women, who cannot obtain clothing through the usual means that normally-statured persons can. Most if not all extremely tall and short people cannot walk into a store and purchase clothes, which may only be available via Internet shopping. Although this seems a minor inconvenience, and certainly many people struggle to find mass-produced clothing that fits, the unavailability of clothing for very short and tall women and men not only reminds them that they are outside the norm but inserts another degree of staturization into their lives. Part of the appearance-work of extremely tall and short women and men includes adapting available clothes to fit tall and short bodies. For most tall and short people, this involves the extra expense and effort of tailoring clothes. Short persons adapt mass-produced clothes by hemming pants and shirts. Dennis, 5'5", said, "I don't really know what my inseam is, but I'll take anywhere from one to two inches off of that. Now I wear my pants not sagging around my

ankles. I don't like that and so sometimes I end up having them cut a little too short and I have high waters, but I'd rather do that for me then have a bunch of cloth around my ankles."

Although some stores carry petite sizes, the shortest women still hem a few inches from off-the-rack petite pants.

With the boom of online stores, many tall people find extended sizes on the Internet and can order from a limited selection of tall styles. Despite the presence of "big and tall" stores for men, few stores carry pants beyond a "long" inseam for women, but online stores offer up to a 38" inseam and tall-style shirts. For example, the Gap, Inc., stores carry a 34" inseam called "long" in their brick-and-mortar stores, but online offer up to 37" inseams in women's pants as well as shirts proportioned for taller women (Gap, Inc. "Size Charts"). The contemporary chain of Casual Male and Destination XL stores, which carry "big and tall sizes" of up to 42" inseams and extra-long shirts, has over 150 physical locations in the U.S. (Destination XL "Size Profile," "Store Locator"). The company Long Tall Sally, which has pants available up to 38" inseams and tall-proportioned shirts, has four physical stores in the U.S. and another 21 stores in Canada, Britain, and Germany (Long Tall Sally "Our Fit," "Our Stores"). Robin, 5'11", described purchasing pants two size larger than the size she wore "just to get a little bit more length because then I could wear the waist really low" before the online market expanded to include tall selections. Other strategies of tall women for adapting available clothes from physical stores include shopping in the men's department, wearing dresses as shirts or strapless dresses as skirts, wearing regular-length pants as capris, and removing the cuffs from sleeves and pant legs. These strategies are part of short and tall people's arsenal of methods for dealing with staturized culture.

Robin recalled a shopping trip from the early 1980s with her normally-statured sister, who thought “I wasn’t looking hard enough and I wasn’t trying on enough stuff” to find flattering outfits, in the early Eighties. Robin described her sister as “four years younger than me, and a shopper who is 5’7” and looks like Cindy Crawford. She who has no problem finding things so she was determined that she could find clothes for me.” Robin’s younger sister said, “‘We’re going to the mall and we’re going from one end to the other and I will find you something. I will find you clothes.’ We were there for a very, very long time.” On their shopping trip, Robin and her sister “went through every store. At the one end of the mall is this Big and Tall store. So we finally get to that and she goes, ‘Well, let’s go in here and see if I can find you anything.’” But inside, the two women only found tall clothes for larger sizes than what fit Robin. “And so there wasn’t going to be anything for me,” Robin explained. Her sister “looked at me and she goes, ‘Well, you’re right. There is nothing out here for you.’” With the relative ease that Robin’s normally-statured sister experienced buying clothes, she could not imagine that Robin truly did not have access to the same:

“I think she was defeated. It wasn’t that I think she felt sorry for me, but I think she understood then why I wore oversized items to get the length. She stopped bothering me after that. I think she had to come to the realization that it’s not for the lack of trying. I can’t find anything. But I think that she needed to prove to herself that either she could find something for me or I was telling the truth.”

From this shopping trip, Robin’s sister learned how such a basic part of contemporary life differs for extremely tall women.

Most tall and short persons have greater access to better-fitting clothing from online retailers than when they relied on brick-and-mortar stores or creative tailoring. However, when Paige, a 6’3” fashion stylist specializing in tall female clients, launched an online boutique for tall women with her sisters, many normally-statured women inquired about conventional sizes.

Paige stated, “And I’m like, ‘You don’t realize because you’re—I hate to say the word *regular* because it sounds so derogatory—because you are the norm, you don’t see what we go through.’” What Paige and other tall and short persons do see, however, is the staturization of culture influencing their daily lives. Tall and short men and women know that the time, money, and effort they spend on finding clothes that fit their bodies—not necessarily that flatter them or that they like or that follow fashion trends, aspects that might cause normally-statured persons to devote those resources to finding clothes—reflects the arrangement of embodied privilege within our staturized culture.

Mass Design and Public Spaces: The Dominance of Normal Height as a Staturized Boundary

Tall people experience emotional reactions of frustration and anger as they navigate myriad aspects of the too-small built environment. Most tall persons expressed the desire for space that accommodates them. Even in the privacy of their homes, tall people experience physical pain and discomfort and emotional frustration from the average height-standardized design of their residences. Courtney, 6’1”, stated, “I keep telling my husband when we build our dream house that we’re going to build it with tall counters and tall sinks. It’s a huge issue, but people just don’t understand. Our friend in real estate says that it’s going to decrease the resale value of the house. And I said, ‘It’s worth it to me if it’s going to save my back.’” Builders and manufacturers could redesign public spaces and mass-produced goods to include taller bodies, tall participants argued. Products and spaces accommodating tall people often do not exist or must be special-ordered rather than accessed in stores as most other people can. Shane, 6’10”, explained, “From a retail standpoint, I wish that more retailers would realize that we’re getting taller and there’s a market for tall people. They opened up Puma store at the mall, and they flat out told me that there wasn’t anything in my size. It’s frustrating to be told that.” Tall persons’ frustration correlates with the exclusion of tall women and men from popular culture via

clothing. Jill, 6'2", recounted her disappointment over fruitless shopping trips reminding her that regular-market clothing discounts the existence of women her size:

"I kind of pride myself on my sense of style. I spend a lot of time looking for clothes. I have an image that I'm pretty meticulous about maintaining. I can't really enumerate what that is very well. Sometimes I'll get something in my head that I want, like I'll want a pair of pants that are Kermit green and are ankle length. A lot of times when I'm shopping for clothes, because I've always pictured myself as being totally normal, and I'll be at a store like H&M or Forever 21 or Target and I'll get some pants and I'll be like, 'This is going to be great. These are so cute, I'm going to love wearing these.' And I'll go into the changing room and the pants well be so woefully mis-fitting. They're so low-rise it's ridiculous. It barely goes two inches above my groin. They ankle length pants are almost to my knees. A dress barely covers my butt. It's disappointing to go in and start grabbing these things assuming that I'm a normal person and then having this be like, 'oh you're not normal. Here's a reminder. You're difficult to shop for.' I tried to take that in stride and know that clothing is something that is meant to really be for the majority, and I'm not the majority. But it's difficult to have this happen to me so often."

The design of the built environment in both public and private spaces as well as the design of material culture, particularly clothing, explicitly excludes and marginalizes extremely short and extremely tall women and men. The emotions that attend this exclusion demonstrate that these otherwise innocuous processes—manufacturing clothes or planes that fit most people rather than all people, for example—have pervasive symbolic effects because height establishes critical social and cultural boundaries.

Very short and tall women and men know the ways that staturized culture creates symbolic boundaries between "normal" height and "extreme" shortness and tallness, and the forceful emotional significance of the status of *normal* to tall and short persons reveals the distinguishing power of staturized boundaries. Many tangible and concrete components of staturized culture demarcate the normally-statured from the extremely tall and extremely short. Because capitalist production designs for the largest number of consumers—the normally statured—very tall and very short persons often struggle to literally fit with and into items of material culture and the built environment, such as clothing and transportation. Shane, 6'10",

like many other tall and short people, has to consider his size for the most mundane activities, such as carpooling. Other typical activities exclude him, such as roller coasters because the ride operators cannot fit the safety harnesses over the length of his torso. These tangible artifacts remind short and tall persons of their incongruence with the world with the category of normal, including its expression in professional contexts. Material culture demonstrates the ubiquity of staturization and evokes emotional responses from annoyance and frustration to hurt and anger when the very tall and short attempt to use everyday objects. In particular, travelling poses problems, especially for tall people in airplanes or unfamiliar cars. A consultant with international clients, Paige, 6'3", described the agitation she experiences while traveling by plane:

"Oh my gosh, airplanes. Ugh. It's so annoying. There's never enough space. Even with them making bigger and larger planes, I still am too tall. I try to get the front section seat, but of course I never get it because there aren't enough. There's only a few. Flying, especially when I go international, it's annoying. Over 10 hour flights are so frustrating because you want to stretch and you can't. And the person in front of you has their seat back, and then you're like, 'Oh my God, do you guys realize I'm 6 feet tall? Give me a break here!' Traveling, honestly, is probably the worst in the plane because it's so uncomfortable you can't really relax. I can't sleep. I can't do anything. And then in cars, fortunately I've been able to have bigger cars here, but of course when you go to Europe everything is small there. So to be honest with you, when I was there (I lived there for a while), I felt myself hunching over a lot. In Europe, the archways in the doorways are smaller than here in America, so I would have to always hunch over. It was terrible."

Paige feels physical discomfort crammed into the seat, but other passengers' ignorance of her predicament fitting into the seat and the design of the aircraft compounds her frustration. Leah, 6'3", agreed, "I hate flying." Many tall persons feel humiliation and anger wedged into airplane seats already too small, and other passengers' reclining seats in front of them seat into what little personal space existed reminds them that normally-statured persons navigate the social space of airplanes with more ease. Interpersonally and culturally, tallness and shortness shape daily life in ways that tall and short people are very aware of, yet normally-statured

persons may not be. Leah, 6'3", stated, "If I was 5'9", I wouldn't have to buy tall sizes. People wouldn't ask me idiotic questions, complete strangers wouldn't ask me these questions. I'm always like, 'I would love to go through life for a week being a more normal height. I could fit into my car better. I wouldn't have to duck instinctively through doorways.'" Noah, 6'8", contrasted the social interactions of tall and short people with normally-statured persons, whose height only bears on their interactions in the presence of an extremely tall or short person. Noah said, "When you don't stand out as much, it's okay to walk into a party or group setting and you know the attention is not going to be directly on you. When you walk into a party and your two or three heads taller than everybody else, whether people notice that they're doing it or not, they stare at you." Although most tall and short people deny wanting to permanently change their height, they acknowledge the accumulating stress resulting from the impact of staturization on everyday tasks and interactions.

Many extremely tall people dread or avoid flying, or at least resent the extra costs of "economy plus seats," with an upcharge for a couple inches of additional legroom. One airline refused Noah, 6'8", when he requested the exit row and sat him behind "people in the exit row who are quote unquote normal height and their feet didn't even touch the ground" on a 12-hour flight. Noah stated, "When they came to give me the meal, the lady put down my tray table and it hit my knees and she was like, 'Oh the tray table is stuck.' So she started slamming it up and down, and I was like, 'That's my knees. It can't go down.' So I had to eat lunch or dinner or whatever meal it was on my lap as opposed to using a tray table." Flying, like car shopping, is a dreaded event for most tall people because the aircrafts, designed for most people rather than all people, cause both physical and emotional discomfort and awkwardness. Although extremely tall persons may have strategies that ameliorate some of their discomfort, they are unlikely to be

completely successful. When they engage in a “normal” activity of flying, they experience frustration and embarrassment in response to the design of the planes and the ease that normally-statured (or shorter) persons travel. Charles, 6’3”, who shared other tall people’s dread of cramped airplanes, explained that when the person seated in front of him “is waiting for that ding light to go off so they can hit the little button and throw their seat back into your knees,” that normally-statured person is so unaware what it is like to sit in an airplane as a tall person that they recline their seatback despite that “it’s the worst” for a tall person sitting in the seat behind.

This tension reflects the lack of normally-statured persons’ awareness of height-based privilege. A product called The Knee Defender, a device that prevents another passenger from reclining into one’s legroom, prompted the unplanned landing and forced removal of two disagreeing passengers on a United Airlines flight in 2014 (Associated Press 2014). In his *New York Times* editorial decrying the use of The Knee Defender as an encroachment on his property rights, Josh Barro (2014) insisted, “A no-recline norm would also have troubling social justice implications—for short people. Complaints about knee room are not spread equally across our society. They are voiced mostly by the tall, a privileged group that already enjoys many advantages.” Barro presents an analysis of height lacking nuance; as these interviews show, height shapes tall persons’ daily lives—but not through constant deferment and increased wages. In circumstances where product design obstructs tall and short persons’ usage of them, the privileged group is the normally-statured who can recline or be reclined upon without consideration of how their height affects their use of material culture. Many of my participants, tall and short women and men, cited research on the wage differential between tall and short employees and the likelihood of CEOs to be men over 6’ tall, affirming the belief that taller people are more successful. Yet interactionally and culturally, tall people are not immune from

experiencing height-based discrimination. Tall men and women can access some forms of power from their bodily size, but they often also experience an incompatibility with social spaces and products. They also face increased public scrutiny of their bodies that contributes to marginalization.

Tall and short women and men feel frustration and humiliation from challenges interacting with the world, yet short persons additionally feel those emotions as the result of the implication of incompetence represented by their mismatch with the built environment. When Sean, 5'5", sat on the back row of the buses in Washington, D.C., his feet did not touch the ground. "That was always irritating," he said. "It didn't cause this existential crisis anything, but it was frustrating because it's not comfortable to have your feet be two inches from the ground." For Sean, as well as for many short persons utilizing aspects of the built environment designed for larger average bodies, the physical sensation of discomfort caused him frustration. But the intuited perceptions of onlookers as short persons interact with the built environment in different ways or with more difficulty than taller persons also causes frustration and embarrassment. Katherine, a 5'1" nursing student, said, "I don't want to be unprofessional. It's not like I can step on my patient's bed and hang [the IV bag] on the top of the rail. I think that's my biggest gripe. I get the most aggravated when I can't reach stuff. When I have to grab another nurse or an aid or something to get stuff out of storage for me because I can't reach it, it's really frustrating." Conceptions of professionalism exclude most of Katherine's strategies for navigating the staturized built environment, leaving her with options that insult her sense of self-sufficiency. Negative staturized interactions can emphasize the emotions arising from already frustrating experience with the built environment. Melissa, 4'10", explained how an act as mundane as buying milk becomes emotionally laden as a staturized experience:

“When you can’t reach something on the shelf in the grocery store because they have the milk on the top shelf and only the 1% milk is on the top shelf, the rest of them are on the bottom shelf, then that gets frustrating and you’re like ‘I hate being short’ on those days. That’s why won’t shop at Winn-Dixie because they put their 1% milk on the top shelf and I can’t reach it. Anytime I go to try to reach it I can’t ever find someone to assist me other than customers. Customers are always willing, but the employees are not so I refuse to shop at Winn-Dixie for that reason. I ask customers to help me if I’m out and about at Winn-Dixie or something if I happen to be there. I tried to shop there is much as possible, but save for some reason I have to be there, I’ll just ask another customer because every time I’ve ever asked an employee, they’re like, ‘oh this isn’t my section, I’ll have to get someone else to help you.’ All I need is the top shelf. At Walmart or Publix, they have no problem anytime I am there. Any employee has always helped me there at either one of those places.”

In addition to the design of the grocery store contributing to Melissa’s difficulty negotiating public space, her interactions with employees leave her feeling humiliated and angry. Melissa, like many other short persons, intuit that others observing their challenges or differences interacting with the built environment—an act that already emphasizes their difference in the design of everywhere of public spaces, businesses, and homes—associate shortness with incompetence. Austin, 5’5”, asserted, “I’m not a dwarf. I don’t need a stick to grab things.” As Austin suggests, short people requiring a certain degree of accommodation face the implication of disability. For short and tall women and men, the built environment provokes emotions of anger and frustration—markers of the salience of height as a social boundary between short, tall, and normally-statured persons—and staturized interactions, or even the presence of onlookers, can exacerbate these feelings of irritation because tall and short persons know the symbolic associations of their height.

Material culture provides alerts non-normally statured persons to staturized boundaries. Without direct instruction on the definition of staturized boundaries, mass-produced items and the built environment convey the limits of the boundaries around “normal” bodies. The incongruence of short and tall person’s bodies with material culture reminds non-normally

statured people that designers and manufacturers do not even consider them as potential users—or they represent enough of a minority to justify exclusion. These boundaries so impact the tall and short that many consider medical interventions to access the privileged category of normally-statured. For most, medical interventions are only a fantasy to cope with the influence of staturization on their lives. Whether short or tall people pursue these interventions, their consideration represents the daily pressure of staturized boundaries on non-normally statured individuals.

TALL MEN AT WORK: HEIGHT AND PROFESSIONALISM

Tallness as Embodied Power

The cultural messages correlating size and physical or political power further naturalize staturization and heightism. By individualizing the size-and-power correlation, the symbolic process of staturization as creating meaning due to height appears as an individual person's attribute. For short men, the size-and-power conflation naturalizes the emasculation that manifests in interpersonal interactions. Brian, 5'4", argued, "People in power are perceived differently because of their height. I'll give you some examples: Castro, Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, the Colorado shooter, Jared Loughner, who shot the senator in Arizona. Hitler was actually 6 feet tall. All these are tall guys." However, Brian insisted that the atrocities of committed by tall men are not correlated with their tallness as those committed by short men are attributed to their shortness. Brian continued, "Whose height do you hear of? Napoleon and Kim Jong Il and Charles Manson. Those are the three people whose height gets equated with their misdeeds in their power. They're saying they're angry short men." Austin, 5'5", stated, "There are several short leaders. Martin Luther King, he was 5'5". Malcolm X, he was 6'2". I don't think it matters." Nonetheless, Austin's memorization of those leaders' heights indicates that he has tuned into the rhetorical emphasis on political leaders' stature. These pressures can shape

short men's experiences of masculinity in myriad relationships. Dennis, 5'5", recalled how his father responded to seeing 11-year-old Dennis return from school crying after another student hit him: "My dad said, "'Don't come home crying. You get out there and you handle that boy. Just because you're little, that doesn't mean you can let him push you around.' Something like that." When Dennis's father saw him with "an iron bar and I had knocked the boy down and I was getting ready to hit him in the head with that iron bar," his father amended, "'Dennis, I said beat him up, not kill him.'" This story primarily stuck out to Dennis because his mother had lamented that Dennis's father often "made the issue that just because I was little I couldn't let people push me around." The issue of Dennis's height for him and his father—and the boy spared a strike with an iron bar—represented the cultural pressures of the size-and-power correlation as it plays out for individuals through physicality.

The naturalization of hegemonic assumptions about short and tall men and women appears as truth because height is a biological fact and, the logic of heightism contends, so must be our stereotypes about tall women and men and short women and men. The staturization of culture seems like common sense because cultural messages about height inform our ways of thinking about tallness and shortness despite that stereotypes misalign with the experiences and identities of tall and short people. Cultural messages about the symbolism of height range from direct and indirect qualifications through producers of culture—such as the fashion and film industries—to the most commonplace cultural objects. Melanie, 4'11", explained, "I think the media reinforces ideas that taller women are more beautiful. There are many models that are under 5'7", and even 5'7" is short. Those messages are out there. They're not overt. They're more implicit." Staturized culture, the logic and meanings ascribed to tallness and shortness and inscribed on tall and short bodies, permeates everyday life. Medical height and weight charts are

an example of the codification of normal stature. Alicia, 5', described how the construction of physicians' height and weight charts induced "one of those realizations that I am outside of the normal sphere that things are made for" because "the chart was aligned for an average and I'm so far off." She mentioned another everyday cultural object, pantyhose, with sizing charts that say "if you're this height and this weight or this height and this weight" which size to purchase. But Alicia explained, "My height is barely on the chart because no one really expects you to be that." In addition to these everyday objects that create boundaries around normal height, everyday speech constructs tallness and shortness. Austin, 5'5", explained that even the simplest ways that we talk about height indicate what tallness and shortness mean. The language for short men is "just short." Austin said, "You just hear 'the real short guy.' If you see a tall guy, it's like, 'He's probably 6'2", 6'3". You hear that all the time." The proclivity for people to identify taller men by a more exact measurement, Austin argued, is because "being short is more definitive of a characteristic of someone than being tall. It's just if you're short, you're short." Fashion magazines and doctors' offices standardize normal and desirable height while our speech patterns belie the valuation proscribed to tallness and shortness.

Television and movies provide one source of learning about heightism through staturized imagery. Charles, 6'3", outlined some of the ways that film media creates staturized messages based on his experience as an extra in the superhero action film *Iron Man*. Because actors, like the wider population, are of variant heights that disrupt the staturized ideal, the producers of these cultural products—specifically movies and television shows—must take deliberate and intensive actions to visually manipulate the actors' heights. Charles obtained the part "just because I was tall" and could fit the costume. He explained how the set designers constructed

walking ramps in order to adjust for the starring actors' shortness in roles that the producers perceived should be tall men:

"Robert Downey, Jr., and Don Cheadle are both really short dudes. Terrence Howard is about 6'1". Robert Downey, Jr., is about 5'6" or 5'7" maybe. Short guy. For every scene they had these four-inch lifts on his shoes that he had to walk around in and they had him standing on boxes. Don Cheadle, same thing. He had to wear the tall shoes, and whenever he would be walking next to somebody the other person would be walking on the ground and they would make a catwalk for him to walk on so that he looks taller because he was supposed to be this tough colonel guy. And Robert Downey, Jr., is this tough Tony Stark guy. To put forth that idea of masculinity, they were trying to make these guys look taller than they actually were so that we as your average moviegoers would look at them like, 'Oh wow, you must be a real man. You're Iron Man because you're tall.'"

Through the manipulation of actors' heights on screen to align with and perpetuate the cultural correlation between tallness and masculinity, the producers of the Iron Man franchise delivered shots that visually aligned with staturized culture in a taken-for-granted manner. The audience cannot see the lifted shoes or catwalks that the male superhero-leads use to fulfill staturized gender, and so staturized culture and the hypermasculinity of tallness appears natural. The film producers undertook deliberate and extensive efforts to alter the height of the actors because tallness has such significant resonance as a cultural image, especially in the realm of comic book heroes.

Shortness as a Professional Liability

Short persons encounter assumptions about their incompetency and immaturity in professional settings. Without the abundance of cultural imagery affirming their ability and success, short persons have the additional burden of overcoming professional preferences for taller leaders. Nicole, 4'10", stated, "I know I have to overcome a lot more than the average person. I know I actually have to work harder. If I'm explaining stuff, I know I have to go that extra step to prove I know what I'm talking about." She described how she deliberately modifies her comportment to counteract others' perceptions of her as a short woman:

“Even my voice is kind of childlike. I have to prove extra that I know what I’m talking about. I think it’s shaped my whole demeanor. I have to actually work to be less timid, that way people will actually take me seriously. I noticed that at every job I’ve ever had, there’s always been someone tall that picks on me. I think they perceive me as childlike, so they’re like, ‘Well I’m an adult I’m going to push her around’ or whatever. They may be the same level of the job as me, but yet they would act like my boss and tell me what to do.”

Because being a short woman is a particular liability in professional settings, Nicole has to deal with the dominance of what her height symbolizes in our stereotypes of short women over her personal characteristics as a human being and coworker. Amy, 5’, explained how this first-impression deficit was one of the reasons why she chose not to become a lawyer, an occupation rife with first-impressions and imagery of power. She said, “I had this image of myself as this little tiny thing not being able to see over the podium, trying to be able to project my voice, and people just thinking about my size.” Fluent in the ways that staturization influences these scenarios, Amy knew the symbolic bearing that her height would have in a courtroom. She would already be at an embodied power deficit “as opposed to a taller person or a man or whatever just being able to talk normally to be heard and taken seriously.” Both tall and short women and men manage their emotional expression with the preconceptions about their height. Brian, 5’4”, described the paradox facing short men as “we can either be passive or if we act assertive at all then they say you have some kind of anger complex or a short man syndrome or a Napoleon complex.” Brian asserted that otherwise mundane interactions can suddenly escalate into a height-based conflict if short men fail to fulfill their staturized roles: “They would be like, ‘All right, shut up little man.’ People don’t want to be told by a short guy anything. We’re just supposed to know our roles and fade back into the background.”

Conflating short women with young women and children naturalizes the staturization of culture by substituting a seemingly asocial fact—the smallness of children—with cultural constructions of age, power, and size. Regarding cultural meanings of power, short women

represent two unvalued categories of bodies: female and small. When people mistake short women for youth, they rely on their ideas about children's powerlessness rather than the impossibility that someone both short and female could participate in adult life. Chelsea, 5', has to show identification when she attends R-rated movies. "As a nurse," she explained, "I'll have to stand on my tippy toes to hang an IV bag, and the patient will say, 'Are you big enough for this job?' Things like that. Or they'll think that I'm so young that: 'Oh man, you might not know what you're doing. How old are you? Are you old enough to be a nurse? Are you old enough to graduate college?'" Chelsea's shortness symbolizes youth and inexperience, and that discredits her with her patients. Short women's bodies can be doubly negative in contexts valuing expertise and skill because these characteristics do not correlate with smallness or femaleness. Katherine, 5'1" nursing honors student, will "meet somebody and we'll be talking and they'll be like, 'You're really smart aren't you?'" She compared strangers' assumptions about her intellect based on her height with dismissal of other women based on certain unvalued physical characteristics:

"You know how some people assume that about blondes? I have a friend who is blonde and she says everybody assumes she'll be stupid right when they meet her. In some way I think that people aren't expecting a 3.9 student [when they meet me]. Often times I feel like with first impressions, people don't expect me to be smart. I think some of that has to do with my height."

The incongruity of their perceived age and short women's stage in life can clash in others' treatment of them and the denial of the power and authority that we attach to older persons. Danielle, 4'11", encountered strangers at Wal-Mart who insulted her because the two older women assumed she was a pregnant teenager because of her height: "The one lady looks at the other one it and says loud enough, 'Yeah, look at that girl 16 and knocked up.' I was like, 'I'm 21 and I'm married and I'm in the military, so really don't think I'm 16 and pregnant.'" Years

later with now older children, Danielle finds that her smallness negates her expectation of authority with her children. She explained, “When I’ve tried to semi-seriously say to them ‘No, I want you to do this,’ my daughter will say, ‘Yeah, whatever Shorty.’ So when they are 15 and when they’re driving and I’m looking up at them, how do I keep the authority over them? How do I let them realize I am still older, I am still your parent?” Because largeness coincides with authority, Danielle fears reversal in their roles as she cannot embody the power associated with the parent figure. Her husband “always makes the joke, ‘I knew by the time they were in sixth grade, seventh grade they were going to be sending you to your room.’” Danielle and her husband assume when their children outgrow her, the kids will obtain the symbolic authority that Danielle struggles to maintain in her family. Short women’s experiences in the family as well as other areas of life affirm that they are denied authority, particularly in professional settings. Nicole, 4’10”, stated, “I’m under five foot tall and I notice that people treat me much differently than an average-height woman. They seem to talk down to me and treat me like I’m a child and kind of dismiss me. Even if I’m in a position of authority, it’s ‘just ignore Nicole, she’s short.’” Shortness encompassed Nicole’s entire identity in these interactions because we presume that height represents character, power, and competency.

“HEAD AND SHOULDERS ABOVE THE REST”: STATURIZED LANGUAGE AND EXPECTATIONS OF TALLNESS AND SHORTNESS

Connotations of Height in Everyday Speech

Language about height constructs the symbolic meanings of tallness and shortness. Due to the extent of symbolism regarding largeness and women, tall women have their own sensitivities to language. The word *big* and its connotations of masculinity and fatness especially upset tall women. Lori, 5’11”, explained that when acquaintances say “‘wow, you’re a big girl,’” the comment “makes it seem like you’re just not a tall girl, you’re a tall and big girl, like you’re overweight. It’s just a different image in my mind.” This seemingly benign word conjures pain

for many tall women, demonstrating how the simplest phrases represent a cultural schema about height. Leah, 6'3", recounts the ways that the word *big*, and the related term *Amazon*, causes her emotional pain:

"Last week when I was at work, somebody said to me, 'Damn you're a big ass woman.' I do not like that. I'm not a big ass woman. I wear a size 12 pants. I'm not a big woman. People have called me an Amazon. I had a group of teenage girls one time at Old Navy, this is maybe a year ago, say 'Amazon' to my face. I was walking through with my boyfriend, and they said 'Amazons can't buy clothes here.' That's what they said to me. I said, 'Just because I'm tall doesn't mean I can't hear you,' and I walked away. I said, 'That's really hurtful,' and I walked out of the store."

The intense reaction to these common words—*big*, a potential insult for women in a culture that values only small and thin female bodies, and *Amazon*, a reference to mythical one-breasted female warriors and matriarchs—reveals how the doxic meanings of height and gender, personality, and privilege permeate our language and, therefore, our culture. Ashley, 5'11", explained that avoiding the appearance of bigness for tall women extends to shoes, an item loaded with gendered meanings for women. She describes shopping for shoes as "an emotional process": "Just asking for an 11 or 12 you always get that look like 'you have big feet.' I remember in high school, once I went to a shoe store and the guy said, 'Well we don't have your size, but I think I have a shoe stretcher in the back.' I was mortified. I hate asking for bigger shoes. I know it seems so silly, but it's embarrassing." For Ashley, mortification and embarrassment accompany the everyday errand of shoe shopping as both the shoes themselves and interactions with salespersons emphasize her bigness. The interactional exposure of tall women's bigness involves intense emotions of shame, anger, and embarrassment because tallness, as a physical component that cannot be changed, seems more an inherent part of the self. For some women, the tall female self shamefully breaks gender norms.

Particular names and terms, ranging from descriptors to slurs, bother short and tall women and men. Austin, 5'4", avoids the phrase "the little guy" because to Austin that term "sounds so degrading almost." Austin said, "It's just like 'oh the little person.' Makes it seem like I have no authority as a person. I feel discredited immediately. If someone calls me 'short,' whatever, I'm used to it." Like Austin and most other tall and short people, Danielle, 4'11", did not take issue with others including her height as a descriptor. Instead, she despised the word *midget* because the word "is very offensive, not just on a person level but on a respect level of an adult to an adult. Unless you identify that person as being a small person, I just think that's a very slaying name." Brian, 5'4", distinguished between staturized language that might bother him and language that pathologizes short stature. He said, "Being short you are sensitive or aware of using words like 'being short changed,' 'short of the goal,' 'head and shoulders above the rest,' 'stand tall.' People will use them as a punchline when the talking about you because people are just that hilarious." These annoying jokes did not have the same hurtful impact as phrases that connected height with character. Brian explained, "The 'Napoleon complex,' 'short man syndrome,' 'angry dwarf syndrome,' 'little Hitler'—all that is the hurtful stuff." For many short women and men, they find offense in ways of speaking about shortness that serve as code for claims about their character and personality.

Consequences of Staturized Culture: Yearning for Normal Stature

Most short or tall individuals wish for height change in fleeting moments of intensified inconvenience or awkwardness, but some short and tall people desperately wish to alter this relatively unalterable characteristic. Although nearly all short and tall interviewees expressed that they ultimately accept their height—and some, such as Jill, 6'2", might even like to increase their staturized difference because height so shapes their identity—many would appreciate a more normal stature for moments of inconvenience. Many felt like Brian, 5'4", who said,

“Maybe I briefly wished I was taller as a kid, but generally I just wished everyone else would shut up about it. Now do I wish I was taller? No. I would not trade my experiences for anything. As a kid I wanted to get leg lengthening surgery. Now I’m so glad my parents thought that was the dumbest idea they ever heard because it was.” Yet others experienced a more sustained desire to change their height. Melanie, 4’11”, admitted to recently making a joke about leg-lengthening surgery to her stepbrother:

“I know about that surgery because it something that I have thought about before. I don’t think that I would ever seriously do it, but the thought still passes my mind occasionally. I do think about my height still and wishing I could be taller. That desire is still there. I think when I first heard about it, it was maybe three years ago. I was like, ‘oh that is so interesting.’ All these women in Asia are getting the surgery. Of course I think it’s completely ridiculous, but I thought about it as recently as yesterday.”

Many short and tall persons have unique knowledge of medical interventions for shortness and tallness, and they perceive these interventions with longing, guilt, and resentment. This knowledge serves as both a reminder of the extremeness required for altering human height and the impermeability of the boundary around normal height. Austin, 5’5”, injected a couple rounds of Human Growth Hormone (HGH) as a teenager at the request of his father, who “was bothered by my height.” Austin’s father “lived through me with athletics,” and Austin believed “he wanted me to thrive and be dominant, and I think he felt like I couldn’t if I was short.” Despite Austin’s successful high school football career and eventual college athletic scholarship, his father “always talked about getting HGH and injecting me with it, which is kind of an iffy, borderline dangerous thing to do.” Austin had several health reservations about the injections, but more than concerns about whether the drug could cause disproportionate growth, he “felt dirty doing it.” Using the performance-enhancing drug felt “unethical and maybe degrading because it’s like ‘you’re not good enough and you need this.’” Austin’s father treated Austin’s shortness “like I have a disability,” but Austin thought his father failed to accept him when

Austin was already comfortable with his height. Austin said, “It was just ridiculous how far he was going and how much pressure he was putting on me to do this. I know in a lot of cases if you abuse it or you don’t take it right, your jaw is going to grow out or your forehead is going to grow out. Nothing about it seemed worth it. Even if I was going to grow and be 6’ tall and everything is fine, I don’t know if I can sleep at night with myself.” When Austin’s ethical objections outweighed his father’s pressure, Austin refused to continue. Yet, years later, the conflict still upset Austin. He recalled, “It’s hard especially as an adolescent when you have your dad who was a role model at the time telling you, ‘This is the ideal you, you could be this tall. This is what you should be because I’m telling you that.’ And then you think about it and you’re like, ‘I’m happy the way I am. People like me.’” The social and cultural boundaries around normal height resulted in explicit and intense emotions for both Austin and his father, who arguably acted from his own ill-conceived understandings of the meanings of shortness for men in the U.S. Although Austin insisted, “I don’t care if I’m tall or if I’m short. I’m me and I’m okay with having my identity,” his father clearly did not have the same level of acceptance. Thus, Austin experienced a traumatic event in his adolescence caused as much by the meanings of height and the importance of taken-for-granted staturized boundaries as by the unfortunate decisions of his father.

Despite the numerous negative influences of staturization on social interactions and relationships, the outsider perspective can also provide a measure of weeding out friendships. Leah, 6’3”, explained, “On the personal side of things, it’s part of who I am so the people who really don’t care about it are the ones that are the right people to be friends with.” Because short and tall persons can see the layout and mechanisms of staturized culture and heightism, they often seek relationships with individuals who eschew the stereotypes and jokes that otherwise

plague non-normally statured individuals' daily lives. Similar to how other forms of inequality affect our daily lives yet only the disadvantaged or oppressed groups perceive that influence—as women and persons of color have historically identified how sexism and racism shape their lives, for example—tall and short women and men see the mechanisms of staturization because their lives are most starkly influenced. Staturization of culture shapes the daily lives of very short and very tall people due to the integration of bodies with our personal identities.

PEOPLE AS PUNCHLINES: HUMOR AND HEIGHTISM

Humor and “jokes” serve both as forms of staturized boundary-work and as evidence of the logic of staturized culture. These so-called jokes may include outright derogatory content or deploy popular culture in insulting ways. Melanie, 4’11”, stated that when “people call me a midget, it’s not really the term that bothers me. It’s not like I’m offended by that term, I think it’s more than the fact that they’re making fun of my height.” What bothers her is not the content of their comments or particular jokes but rather “the fact that they are willing to joke about it.” Tall and short persons’ availability as punchlines reinforces heightism both in actual interactions and in their awareness of their vulnerability for ridicule. People use characters and popular culture references to make jokes about tallness and shortness. Most very tall women and men experienced being called some form of “Jolly Green Giant.” Brian, 5’4”, recalled people calling him “Willow,” after the main character in “an old-school movie about this little guy who’s very, very short and he was some kind of little warlock or something.” He said, “Being short is considered to be a funny thing. Part of that is how we’re treated in the media: we’re always jolly little elves. We’re a joke. We’re considered a punchline.” As people employ these macro-level cultural references to joke about height in micro-level interactions, they demonstrate staturized symbolism pervades our broader culture and that what seems unrelated to height can be wielded to marginalize short and tall persons, if only for a moment.

In addition to speech, physical interactions render short and tall people as punchlines. Katherine, 5'1", explained, "I don't think anybody was ever malicious or mean and I've never felt like anybody was trying to make fun of me for being short. It was just in a way that was goofing around." However, their "goofing around" often included hurtful interactions, in particular holding objects out of her reach. She said, "When you're short, that's everybody favorite thing is to take something and hold it up high so that you can't reach it. I say, 'You're a dick. Give that back to me. I don't want to play this.'" Sometimes still people do that to me, and I'm like, 'I really don't think you're funny.'" The assumption in these regurgitated physical antics that expose obvious height difference is that shortness is inherently humorous. Brian, 5'4", described how his height would influence his standup comedy despite that none of his routine mentioned height. He said, "When I would do comedy it had absolutely nothing to do with my height. It didn't occur to me. But a good percentage of the time the audience would heckle me before I would even talk. Based on my height they would start yelling at me: 'Hey Shorty, we can't see you! Stand up!'" The staturized jokes came not only from antagonistic audience members but also from physical jokes by the supposedly-friendly club host. Brian explained that the host would announce him and "take the microphone stand and unscrew the stand and drop it all the way down to the bottom level." With the microphone signaling his shortness as it rests even too low for him to use, Brian said he is "forced to address it at that point. That's something I had to get used to. I usually did pretty well diffusing it, but it at the level of strain on me that an average height or taller comedian wouldn't have to put up with." The shared meanings of these jokes—film characters, names like "Shorty" or "Jolly Green Giant," misuse of outdated medical terminology—weave popular culture into methods of maintaining staturized boundaries.

Individuals living in staturized culture under the constant threat of staturized interactions, very short and very tall people often utilize humor about their *own* height as a strategy for diffusing and minimalizing staturized interactions. Lindsey, 6'7", said she uses "the sense of humor approach" when "people ask the typical questions that tall people get." The language that Jill, 6'2", uses to describe her body exaggerate her tallness to the point of comedy, "like I have a very long torso so I say that I have a torso that is '12 feet long,' which is an exaggeration, or I say that my feet are 'paddleboats.'" Although Jill said this habit might be "kind of self-deprecating, but it's one of those things that I don't see as self-deprecating. I see it as true." Tall and short persons can attempt to "own" the impact of staturized culture in their lives by utilizing height-based humor. Katherine, 5'1" said, "This is horrible. I often refer to myself as a nugget, just like a little nugget, you know. Somebody will be like, 'Will you do this?' I'm like, 'Guys, I'm just a little nugget. I can't do it.'" Versed in the nuances of staturized culture, extremely short and tall persons can—and, sometimes, must—craft the cleverest jokes at their own expense. As Sean, 5'5", explained, "If I think it's funny, then you win because I have better short jokes than anybody else does." Tall and short persons' jokes about their own height can serve to point out how height is a social experience by acknowledging the often ridiculous assumptions about height as well as how tall and short people have a shared experience in staturized culture. Margaret, 5', stated, "Sometimes, just between friends, you'll joke about height. Like at work, we'll kid each other about, 'Hey you need a step stool?' We joke right back with the tall people about different things." Paul, 6'9", admitted, "I joke about it a lot" because staturized interactions and the incongruence between his body and the built environment seems absurd to him. Paul wrote an entry on his blog about height and clothing, and he explained, "I want to leave it there because it's funny and my friends like it, but also because everyone so out some

tall person may get to it and be like this is exactly what's going on with me. I didn't know that other people at the same problem." The weight of staturized culture on an individual's life, such as through the pressure of the taller-man norm to have conforming sexual relationships, can lead tall and short individuals to opt for humor as a way of acknowledging the constraining force of staturization on their choices. Rachel, 6', uses humor to take ownership of her preference for conforming to the taller-man norm: "It's a huge joke among my friends and me: I always say, 'You have to be this high to ride this ride.'" Rachel utilizes well-known references (amusement park signs) to humorously convey her experience as a tall woman.

CONCLUSION

Extremely tall and short women and men intuit the meanings of their difference within our staturized culture. The built environment and material culture—tangible and typically massed-produced aspects of culture—remind very short and very tall persons of their incongruence with “normal” life as they cannot interact with these components of culture as the designers intended or as normally-statured persons can. Clothing stores, mass transportation, and professional offices represent public spaces where non-normally statured persons confront the strongest emotions because of the staturized boundaries evident to the very tall and the very short in these places. The dearth of available clothes informs non-normally statured persons of their otherness. But their emotional responses to this experience extend beyond frustration to hurt and pain at the meanings of such exclusion. While the “Knee Defender” controversy reflects the tension over space aboard airplanes, the stories of the tall demonstrate that the built environment accommodates the dominant group of normally-statured persons. Short people, on the other hand, negotiate social spaces with the threat of perceived incompetence, complicating simple daily tasks such as buying milk. Heightism is built into the design of the built environment and mass-produced clothing through the assumption of normally-statured users and consumers. The

professional office represents a place where cultural assumptions about tall and short persons affect the experiences, choices, and opportunities of non-normally statured persons. The association between tallness and power can provide tall persons—particularly tall men—advantages in the workplace. Conversely, stereotypes about short persons' incompetence harm their employment prospects. These stereotypes reflect the representations of shortness and tallness in the media and in our discursive constructions of height.

Ultimately, humor legitimizes heightism by individualizing staturized culture and dismissing structural discrimination as a single person's sensitivity or naturalizing staturization. But there would be no comedic resonance without a social process of inequality, as racist, sexist, ableist, and heterosexist jokes evidence. When non-normally statured persons deploy jokes about height, they contribute to the replication of staturization and heightism. Because these jokes about their height and their bodies are so ingrained in the daily lives of very short and very tall women and men, their staturized humor can also be a symptom of internalized heightism. Veronica, 5'10", regretted, "I really wish someone would've told me when I was a teenager to not make jokes about it. I think a lot of tall people, myself included, use a lot of humor to deal with it so that no one would think it would make me uncomfortable for them to say something because I'm going to say it about myself anyways." Humor defines the staturized experiences of many short and tall men and women. Often, they replicate the situations that comprise heightism through their self-deprecating staturized humor. As Veronica suggested, "There's kind of a weird bit of self-hatred in that." Tall and short individuals learn and participate in culture just as normally-statured persons, and the jokes they make about themselves reflect their own deployment of the symbolic meanings of height.

CHAPTER 4

THE STATURIZED SELF: MICROAGGRESSIONS AND THE HABITUS

Within a staturized culture, the term *staturized interactions* refers to the influence of height on tall and short persons' experiences interacting with others, particularly normally-statured persons, both through explicit comments about height the unsaid impact of height on the situation. Non-normative height can legitimize interactional evaluations of individuals as, for example, aggressive or passive, competent or incompetent, masculine or feminine, normal or abnormal. Goffman (1967, 31) describes "a double definition of self: the self as an image pieced together from the expressive implications of the full flow of events in an undertaking; and the self as a kind of player in a ritual game who copes honorably or dishonorably, diplomatically or undiplomatically, with the judgmental contingencies of the situation." Specifically, height stigma alters the "rules of demeanor," or expectations of interactional behavior that result in the assignment of character attributes, due to the conspicuousness of extreme shortness and extreme tallness in interactions. The very tall and very short know that their height is a primary factor in their first impressions. Dennis, 5'5", likened initial judgments about tall and short people to other first impressions based on physical characteristics. He said, "I know that when you look at people, part of what you see is how tall they are. Let's say I'm sitting with an African-American and they say I didn't even notice you were white. That's a lie because I am." Dennis qualified that making these observations about someone "doesn't make it good or bad, but I noticed because that's who they are and part of who I am. I think the same is true with height. It's one of those subtle things that you might not bring up, you might not even intellectually perceive." Just as persons make assumptions about individuals based on physical indications of race, gender, or other markers suggesting class, status, or sexuality—designations married with imagery and stereotypes loaded in each category—people make assumptions about short and tall people based

on the personality characteristics we associate with shortness and tallness. Tallness and shortness are relative designations understood and experienced relationally, both through discourse and physical proximity to other individuals. When the salience of height affects interactions between people, resulting in the staturization of interactions, onlookers feel awe, surprise, or curiosity toward extreme tallness and shortness and non-normally statured persons, often in response, feel embarrassed, irritated, or even special—thus maintaining the symbolic boundaries around normal height and the categories of tall and short. Through staturized interactions, normally-statured persons expose—wittingly or unknowingly—difference between themselves and extremely short and tall individuals. Andrea, 6', often did not think of her height until "I would see a woman who was as tall as I am, which is not all that common, I would go, 'Oh my gosh, am I that tall?' I would ask people around me, 'Am I as tall as she is?' Because she looked taller than I felt." Because these perspectives are normal for extremely short and tall persons, encounters with others may thrust their difference into focus—difference loaded with meaning and emotions. In addition to the difference in body size relative to others, verbal signifiers in the form of comments, questions, and jokes transform the physical difference of height to a socially and symbolically meaningful category protected by staturized boundaries. Margaret, 5', explained, "It didn't occur to me until much later in life that I was short. Everybody's just always taller than me, but that never really felt weird. It still doesn't really feel weird until people bring it up." Tall and short persons may not constantly experienced their height as difference, but interactions—proximity to others of different heights and the exposition of height within conversation—staturizes the situation.

Intense emotions characterize the interactional boundary work between normal- and non-normal statures as well as between tallness and shortness. Normally-statured persons may feel

surprised or confused by extremely tall and short bodies, but this is a passing sensation. Non-normally statured people, however, feel the emotional consequence of the interactional boundary work as part of their everyday lives—even if they believe they should not allow a physical trait to affect them so greatly. As this chapter will show through the stories of the very tall and the very short interacting with normally- and other non-normally statured persons, emotions arise relationally (Theodosius 2006). The emotional sum of these interactions, or “emotional pasts” of how someone remembers an emotional experience, affect interaction and identities (Mattley 2002). The emotions that accompany staturized boundary work are so potent because they attend the social divisions made in these interactions and designated by staturized culture. I argue that intense emotions surround the boundary-work between normally- and non-normally-statured persons as well as between tall and short people because these symbolic boundaries indicate the social patterning of height despite its common-sense understanding as a natural fact without social significance.

The correlation of height and identity along with the meaning-making processes of staturization create a commonality of experiences and dispositions for the short and tall. In addition to the impact of height on how others perceive non-normally statured people, height shapes how the very tall and the very short understand *themselves*. Although colored differently by shortness and tallness, both occupy a “staturized habitus.” The concept of the habitus merges an agent’s social position and life experiences. Bourdieu (1984, 170) asserts that the habitus both “organizes practices and the perception of practices” and “organizes the perception of the social world,” which “is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes.” The habitus provides us with a script as to what to do and why, who can do what and why. With such a knowledge of why some cannot participate in the same social scripts (because of natural

unworthiness and illegitimacy) and why we cannot participate in others' social scripts (which are presumed to be superior and more legitimate), a certain habitus seems better than others.

Bourdieu argues that a set of historical relations are embodied in the habitus, and, therefore the habitus is denaturalized because it is created over time and through symbolic struggle. By denaturalizing the habitus, especially in terms of class, Bourdieu highlights how the arbitrariness of tastes, behaviors, and language delineates social positions. Yet we can also see how the embodied habitus, naturalized on the body, results from deliberate cultivation or body-environment effects. Using ethnography of dance groups and classes, Delamont and Stephens (2008) analyze how instructors of the increasingly popular dance and martial art *capoeira* develop a habitus for their students, and how that construction differs in Britain and Brazil. The capoeira dance class reveals how individuals develop a new habitus through cultivating the proper emotional and mental outlook and its correlating techniques of the body (70). Warin, Moore, and Davies (2015, 12) use obesity epigenetics to demonstrate the ultimate relationship between the social and the biological through their concept of the "biohabitus" as intergenerational transmission of obesity occurs through "the molecular and structural processes of food and eating incorporating each other," indicating "how the social and biological environments interact and respond to each other across the life course." For the tallest and shortest individuals, the biological fact of their height interacts with their social environment, namely through staturized culture and staturized interactions, to shape their identities, dispositions, and life choices.

In this chapter, I explore how the salience of height in interactions shapes the staturized habitus. I begin with an examination of "staturized microaggressions," or comments to non-normally statured persons that marginalize them while maintaining symbolic boundaries between

normally-statured, tall, and short persons. The emotional reactions of non-normally statured individuals to these interactions indicates the symbolic potency of these boundaries. I then discuss how coping with staturization, particularly its interactional dynamics, crafts the staturized habitus. The staturized habitus includes an outsider perspective on the cultural mechanics of height, particularly interactionally, with particular lines of action for dealing with microaggressions and interactional emotion work. Next, I present another dimension of the staturized habitus: height-specific internalized dispositions. Tall and short persons' demeanor and choices reflect the expectations of who non-normally statured persons "are." In conclusion, I argue that height represents a logic of sorting persons into social categories.

"DO YOU PLAY BASKETBALL?" STATURIZED MICROAGGRESSIONS

Daily Discrimination: Overt and Subtle Interactional Heightism

Many staturized interactions can be classified as "microaggressions" as others' comments instruct the tall and short on the symbolic boundaries that exclude them from the category of normal. The term "microaggression" typically describes everyday covert insults toward persons of color that marginalize and demean them; I argue that the interactional experiences of non-normally statured persons contain the same ostracizing and insulting elements in their daily lives. Furthermore, I argue that staturized microaggressions reveal that microaggressions are not only insults but instances of boundary-work between the speaker and the target. Tall and short persons cannot avoid the salience of their height in daily interactions in public spaces, thus, most of their experiences involve some degree of staturization. Normally- and non-normally statured individuals learn and reconcile the symbolic meanings of height interactionally. The staturization of interactions evokes poignant relational emotions in normally-statured people, who find short and tall bodies surprising or confusing, and non-normally statured people, who find the constant salience of their size to be annoying, hurtful, or maddening. In order to minimize the effect of

their height on interactions, tall and short people manage the emotions of others by disarming the jarring effect of their bodies, monitor their own emotive expressions, and avoid situations where the hassle of staturized interactions outweighs other goals. Height shapes most interactions of tall and short persons throughout their daily lives, carrying a potent emotional load as they have to deal with others' comments and stares. Yet the emotional responses of normally- and non-normally statured persons to these interactions represents more than just irritation at inconveniences and inconsiderateness—these reactions indicate where and how symbolic boundaries exist between normally-statured, the extremely tall, and the extremely short.

Tall and short people experience offensive comments and discrimination in everyday situations that we would consider inappropriate toward other social groups—yet non-normally statured persons endure these interactions daily. For tall women and men, people's inquisitiveness about tall persons' personal details breaks many politeness and privacy norms yet strangers regularly question tall women and men about their bodies and lives. Paul, 6'9", said, "You never go to a fat person and say, 'Hey, you're fat!' or 'How much do you weigh?' But they're okay coming up to us. You don't go up to a short person and ask how tall they are because that's rude. There's this weird okay to go to the tall person and make conversation." Noah, 6'8", agreed, "Walking up to a random person and being like, 'How much do you weigh?' or 'Did you play basketball?' or 'What size shoes do you wear?' would seem very uncomfortable to ask most people, but not for tall people." Despite his irritation, Noah "rolls with the punches" when "people ask you what would be normally socially unacceptable questions but they don't think it is rude because they are so fascinated with how tall I am." Paul and Noah, like many tall people, acknowledged that some degree of respectful fascination is tolerable, but all too often tall people must field rude jokes and comments. Paul explained, "We can be fine if the person is

polite and the person is surprised they just want to strike up conversation. And for every polite person there are three or four idiots who are just being funny with their friends. That's not okay." Often, the excuse of curiosity justifies the unwanted attention, but these tall men (and many other tall women and short men and women, who report similar frustrations) take issue with the inconsiderateness of these remarks as much as their blatant offensiveness.

The Accumulation of Staturized Microaggressions as an Outsider Perspective

Singular staturized interactions combine into an experience of harassment for short and tall individuals, but the referential framework of meanings about height adds a symbolic dimension. Tall and short women and men not only encounter small building blocks of harassment in their daily lives, but also as the wider culture presents valuations of tallness and shortness that provides the symbols for others to tap for their remarks about height. Melissa, 4'10", described the stock jokes and symbols she encountered as a short girl growing up: "Shorty and Little One, stuff like that." Sean, 5'5", stated, "It was just like 'I'm going to be funny if I'm going to joke about Sean's height.' I was just there for people to piggyback off of. I feel like some people feel compelled to make a joke about it." Sean often avoided these compulsive wisecrackers because "I don't want to hear the same joke every day for the rest of my life." Austin, 5'5", explained that "it's just joking around" when people mock his stature: "'You're short, ha ha.'" Yet in other instances, other people can use height-based humor to silence him. "Sometimes it's at your expense," he said. "If you say something, people are like, 'Whatever you're short. Laugh at him.' It's a cheap laugh, nothing I get upset out or anything like that. 'Okay, good one. I've heard that 100 times.'" It is the very sense that Austin has heard that joke 100 times that constitutes these statements as microaggressions: not only do these interactions marginalize—and regularly belittle—the non-normally statured but they comprise a regular component of tall and short persons' lives.

The frequency of these hurtful and often derogatory comments toward non-normally statured persons is a force of marginalization for the very tall and short. These staturized “microaggressions,” like racial microaggressions, are one way that heightism endures as a socially permissible form of inequality. Sue et al. (2007, 273) state, “Microaggressions are brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group.” Yet microaggression characterizes the interactions between individuals from privileged and disadvantaged groups in many categories. Ross-Sheriff (2012, 234) encourages a broader definition of microaggression to include any targeted identity:

Microaggressions are communications perpetrated by individuals or organizations that convey disrespect to the target individuals or groups. They may be overt or subtle. The conveyed hostility and the hurtful effect may be intentional or unintentional. They may be one-off or part of a pattern. Their effect is often to marginally reduce the confidence, self-esteem, or effectiveness of the target persons.

Regardless of intent, individuals of any height habitually insult and ostracize extremely short and tall women and men. Austin, 5’5”, stated that although he “might be the strongest guy in the weight room,” teammates will “discredit” his weightlifting because “but there’s always the ‘well you’re short, you have short arms.’” Austin objected, “If you’re short guy and you squat a lot or you benchpress a lot, then it’s like it doesn’t count because you’re short. I always found that frustrating. I’ll put in countless hours or effort and in return people around me blow it off.” Socially, the biological and physical length of Austin’s arm justifies his teammates’ belittling of Austin. From the conflation of tallness and power, tall employees often experience a boss-subordinate relationship rifled with microaggressions because their height challenges the power dynamic. Lindsey, 6’7”, spent eight years working with her 5’11” boss who had “a very in-your-face kind of personality” who “made multiple comments that she hates that I’m taller.” Lindsey’s boss wore “like four inch heels and I’m still taller. She gets upset about it.” Throughout her

employment, Lindsey's boss said "little jabs pretty regularly." When Lindsey left her position, her boss presented her "with an award in front of 200 people, and she made a joke about how I was standing below her on the platform and she liked that better because she hated how tall I was. She had her microphone on." Charles, 6'3", described how his tallness also shaped his adversarial relationship with his boss in the military. Charles described him as "a full-bird Colonel, which if you're not familiar with the military he's a very high-ranking officer, and he was probably only about 5'5" or 5'6". He rode me into the ground. He was unnecessarily mean to me." Although Charles explained, "I don't even see my height as an actor and a player in my social interactions anymore," his colleagues convinced him that his superior's attitude toward him was due to Charles' height. His coworkers told him, "'I think one of the main reasons why he was always being mean to you was that he had some Napoleon syndrome toward you.' They said, 'Charles, it's because you're tall. That's what it is, I guarantee you.'" Charles explained that his military sensitivity training influenced his expectations that he would not be judged on physical characteristics. He stated, "I would hope that if I'm not going to look at people's exteriors like that I would hope that they would look at me and the same sort of way. Not taking into account race, color, national origin, sex, or height." Yet, Charles experienced the very same degree of hostility based on his physical appearance that we expect for other disadvantaged groups. Sue, Capodilupo, Nadal, and Torino (2008, 278) argue that racial microaggressions are not occasional incidences but rather "constant, continuing, and cumulative experience." Lindsey and Charles' relationships with their bosses included repeated insults, one aspect of their lives among many permeated by microaggressions.

The pervasiveness and subtleties of the symbolic meanings of height render them mostly taken for granted. The intensity of emotional reactions to others' height and of others' reactions

to tallness and shortness indicate the deep-rootedness of the cultural boundaries around normal height—and the effectiveness of these boundaries to craft lives, emotions, and distinctions. Due to the frequency of staturized interactions, short and tall persons enter public spaces with the expectation that their height will explicitly or implicitly determine their interactions. Paige, 6’3”, acknowledges that the attention can be positive: “It’s kind of flattering because every woman wants to be remembered, but it’s kind of like, ‘People, I’m regular. I’m normal.’ But I get a lot of attention. Every time I step out of my house, heads turn. I’m not bragging. That’s literally what happens.” Leaving home, therefore, results in staturized attention and interactions that, although sometimes flattering, are constant if not incessant. Often, conversations about height replace other topics of chitchat for extremely tall and short individuals. Rachel, 6’, explains, “I think sometimes people use it as a way to talk. Even girls in bathrooms when you’re at a bar or club will look up and say, ‘Hey, how tall are you?’ I don’t feel like I look particularly friendly. People are sometimes fascinated about it, especially with women it seems like.” However, men and women outside the boundaries of normal height do not only experience the staturization of everyday interactions—they find their daily lives interrupted by the salience of their height. In particular, strangers approach tall men and women to ask if they play basketball or the exact measurements of their bodies. Paul, 6’9”, stated that he “should start writing it down because I get asked how tall I am about every day.” The everyday comments, which might seem singular to the normally-statured speaker, become so regular that they often seem comical. Paul explains that the regularity of conversations about his height becomes absurd to him:

“Some people guess 6’7”. Some people guess 7’. A few people guess 6’8”, 6’9”. It’s funny. People think it’s like it’s a game. They want to guess it right, and they get kind of upset if they don’t guess it right. It’s like ‘oh I thought you are 6’7”, but you’re 6’9”.’ I joke that they’re stating the obvious: ‘Did you know you’re tall?’ No, I did not know that. Thank you for letting me know. Or like, ‘You should play basketball.’ Oh really? I didn’t think about that. I’m 30 years old. I should go ahead and try for the NBA right now. ‘Do you

know you're tall? Oh my God, you're so tall, I feel so short close to you.' Even though the person is short anyway. And then comparing: 'I have a brother who 6'4". How tall are you?' Those are the more common ones. And then there's others that are funnier or off-the-cuff sometimes. But those are the big ones."

Paul's reaction to the repetitiveness of strangers' typical comments reflects his awareness that his height may be novel to others of normal height. However, the comments and interactions are not unique to Paul or most very short or very tall men and women. These interactions can extend from mundane to awkward and embarrassing as normally-statured persons fetishize height. Shane, 6'10", reported that strangers in his college dorms or at the restaurant where he worked often requested to take his picture. He said, "I remember one time distinctly when I was in one of the girls dorms and a couple of the girls came up from their room and said, 'You have to take your picture with our roommate' because their roommate was like 4'10" or 4'9" or something like that. So they dragged her out and stuck her next to me and took a picture." Regardless of how Shane or any other extremely tall or short person interprets such an experience—as an example of their specialness or their "freakishness"—these situations combine into a staturized relationship with public life.

A formative component of the staturized outsider perspective is the experience of repeated staturized interactions, from off-the-cuff comments to microaggressions, with the additive capacity for inducing a sense of harassment for short and tall persons. Entering public spaces carries the potential for these interactions, regardless of whether short and tall persons consent to them, as their bodies evoke attention regardless of their intentions. As Noah, 6'8," stated, very tall and very short persons "can't fly off the radar." Paul, 6'9", explained, "When you're this tall, you become a public person even though you don't want to be." Lindsey, 6'7", described having "to deal with more tension being tall" because the sum of her staturized interactions "teaches you that you are going to be under scrutiny and people are going to be

watching what you're doing and notice what you're doing, how you're acting." The normal and default relationship of very short and very tall women and men with public spaces and interactions with strangers relies on this assumption of scrutiny and surveillance. Many of the tallest women and men in particular expressed that their largeness signals them as different and attracts attention. Jill, 6'2", argued, "Outside of the culturally acceptable ranges of height for both genders you kind of invite the public to have you be an item of comment or public figure to discuss or open to discussion about your height by any random stranger." With her body as some sort of "invitation" for others' observations, Jill must deal with the barrage of commentary despite her dislike for the interactions. She explained that these staturized interactions are "totally unwelcome for me." Yet others perceive her tall body acts as a de facto consent for their conversational intrusion, as though her tallness grants them permission to remark on her body.

The barrage of comments from normally statured persons—from benign and mundane to hurtful and pointed—can create a summated experience where the additive toll of these comments feels like harassment although the perpetrators are different individuals. The replication of encounters with different persons regarding height leaves the non-normally statured persons with a sense of feeling harassed as these incidents accumulate in his or her perception. Lindsey, 6'7", described her awareness of strangers' "stares and comments and people taking pictures behind my back." Her interactions include "pretty generic stuff" such as when people ask her, "Do you play basketball? How tall are you?" or when small children tell their parents "she's so huge" or "she's big." That's what little kids do." But certainly as a 6'7" woman, Lindsey has experienced more egregious encounters. She explained that people's deception bothers her most:

"I'd rather have stuff like people asking me 'how tall are you?' versus being out and in a bar or to dinner with somebody and turn around see somebody taking a picture behind my

back. That's happened a couple times and that's really annoying. I've had people come up and ask if they can take pictures with me, and I'd rather have them make that contact. I have no problem doing that. If that's what you want to do, that's fine. But have at least the respect to come up to me and ask me instead of being all sneaky about it behind my back."

By photographing Lindsey when she is unaware, these strangers violate her privacy and simultaneously evoke images of freak shows as they treat Lindsey as an oddity presented for their entertainment. Yet Lindsey experiences this treatment repeatedly as part of her everyday life as a 6'7" woman. Amy, 5', described that her staturized interactions are not necessarily influential individually but collectively they have meaning. She said, "There's just so many little occasions. I don't think it's the times individually, it's more like the experience." From the consistency of these often predictable interactions, Melissa, 4'10", stated, "I think you just kind of get used to it." Although the comments are a singular experience for the commenter, they are part of a repeated script for the shortest and tallest men and women. Hannah, 4'10", recounted, "It's funny when somebody new is around me, like somebody that I just met, they kind of point out as if I don't know already or as if they are the first person to recognize that I'm short. They meet me for the first time and they'll be like, 'Wow you're really short.'" Hannah also described how her height can enter conversations even when her stature has "nothing to do with what we're doing." She recalled, "A customer was asking me if we had a certain product in stock and I said let me go check on the computer. As he was following me he was very quiet about it and he was like, 'Do you mind if I ask how tall you are?' I just tell people, 'You know, I'm 4'10'" and it doesn't stop me from doing the things I want to do." Both the customer's question and Hannah's response represent the recycled comments that infringe on very short and very tall person's daily tasks.

Armrests and Assault: Physical Staturized Microaggressions

Predicated on difference in body size, heightist microaggressions involve not only words but physical interactions. Physical staturized microaggressions embody heightism in the form of gestures and contact or approximated contact. Amy, 5', described the range of microaggressions she experiences as a short woman: "Some people make jokes, they'll stick their arm out and lean against me. People that I don't know very well have picked me up and spun me around. Sometimes they apologize after. So I definitely feel like people see me as a little thing, like a little kitty." Taller and normally-statured people habitually rest their arms on the shoulders of short persons, an act that physically accentuates staturization within interactions and literally places the taller person on top of the short person, who is trapped and cannot object without accusations that he or she lacks a sense of humor. "All of my friends would come and have their arm on me, because 'You're the perfect height for me to do this,'" Chelsea, 5', recalled. She explained that she is "always used as someone to put their arm on, like an armrest." Sean, 5'5", affirms that often taller men will "lean on" him because "I am an armrest." By treating shorter people like furniture, taller people enact physical staturized microaggressions in which their bodies convey dismissal, insults, or intimidation. But the scope of physical staturized microaggressions extends to interpersonal violence. After Brian, 5'4", left after he had a "pretty cool for a bar conversation" education discussion with "a real smart dude, a teacher," the man approached him in the parking lot. Brian said, "I go to shake his hand and he goes to try to pick me up. That's a real problem with short people. People always want to pick you up. As an adult that's kind of insulting. You don't want to be picked up and patted on the head. Or people lean on you with their arms." Brian objected to the man attempting to pick him up, saying, "'No man, don't pick me up.' He says, 'Come on, what are you going to do about it, Little Man?'" The man then "locks his arms around me and goes to try to pick me up" while the man's girlfriend

watches. Brian freed himself: “I snatch him by the top of his shoulders and say, ‘Do not pick me up.’ I held him down and said, ‘Do not pick me up.’” Brian “broke loose from him” and returned to his friends inside the bar, where the man followed and “was furious. He had to go step outside for a minute, and he walks outside and slams the door. And now his girlfriend gives me the eye.” Brian stated that he believed the couple was angry because he refused their physical imposition of heightism onto him. He said, “They wanted me to just sit back and let me physically do to me what they wanted to do to me and I have no say over it.” The escalation of this interaction demonstrates the expectation for staturized microaggressions to go unchallenged because of the cultural denial of heightism as a shaping factor in identities, interactions, and discrimination.

Tall and short people react to the staturization of interactions most commonly with annoyance or frustration and hurt or anger. The emotions of irritation or annoyance can result from others’ interruptions, via speech or comportment, preventing a “normal” experience in public. Noah, 6’8”, stated, “I get stared at a lot. That’s annoying. That bothers me, especially when I want to just be or be at a social occasion with my friends and people are always coming up to me. Sometimes that’s great, but when I just want to be alone it’s annoying.” In addition to the behavioral reactions to non-normative height, the repetition of particular responses in public often results in the emotional reaction of annoyance for very tall and very short women and men. Paul, 6’9”, explained, “To me it’s kind of funny, but I could see that it could get annoying to other people.” Yet he admitted that the scientific ridiculousness of the question *How is the weather up there?* perturbed him. He said: “Some people are just rude. They think they’re hilarious and they’re not. One of the things we always heard in Brazil, and I think it’s one of the first things I remember, is ‘how’s the weather up there?’ That doesn’t make any sense. What are you talking about? But that’s the one that we heard over and over again.” Although tall and short

individuals may acknowledge that the offense is unintentional, most agreed that the badgering or invasiveness constitutes rudeness. Nicole, 4'10", said, "It's rude. It's like asking someone's weight or their age. It's just not appropriate. You can see I'm short. You don't need the numbers." Nicole's irritation with the question of her exact height reflects the source of annoyance for many short and tall people: the constant bombardment of comments or personal questions about parts of their life such as dressing and dating can be a relentless intrusion into their privacy by well-meaning strangers. Leah, 6'3", recounted how staturized interactions shaped her first few weeks at a new office as "in the routine of meeting new people they kept saying, 'Oh my gosh, you're so tall.' It's like, you don't think I knew that already? It's something I deal with every single day. 'It's the one thing I am,' that's what I say." Coping with staturized interactions stressed Leah as some of the comments hurt her feelings. Another time, a child in an elevator asked her mother if Leah was a boy or girl, Leah "almost lost my cool at her mom. I told the mom, 'That is not an appropriate thing your child is saying, and you need to handle situation.' She's like, 'Oh, she's just a kid.' I'm like, 'Well it's hurtful.'" Incidences like these "moments when it really stings," Leah, said, are instances "when somebody starts being mean or points out the obvious. It's just like, 'Really, another person saying this to me? Let me ask you this personal question.' It's like, no shit, I know that I'm tall. It's what I am every day." Some short and tall people may not feel hurt by the same conversation, but most can identify a time in which they felt hurt by a remark on their height.

THE STATURIZED HABITUS

Tallness, Shortness, and the Shared Perspective of Staturization

A shared experience of navigating staturized culture and interactions characterizes the staturized habitus for short and tall individuals. As differently statured persons, tall and short women and men have different literal perspectives on the world. One way of responding to the

obvious difference in height and the constant attention is to embrace the attention as a marker of specialness, as Courtney, 6'1". She described herself as "pretty arrogant, and I think some of that stems from being tall." Courtney relishes the attention that she interprets as "a feeling of power and I like it. People will look and that doesn't bother me. I kind of like attention, I guess, sometimes." She maximizes the effect through wearing heels "the taller, the better," and enjoys helping strangers reach items because "I like doing that stuff. I feel like it makes me feel more important, like it's a special attribute to have." When individuals frame height, particularly tallness, to represent their specialness or uniqueness, the introduction of another tall individual can complicate meaning of height in that situation. Ryan, 6'6", admitted that seeing "anyone else tall it always makes me very, very upset because I'm not used to seeing anybody at eyelevel." Yet he also described the instant comradery, or "tip of the hat to another tall person" in meeting someone with a shared experience of tallness.

The social stigmatization of non-normally statured persons can provide them with an outsider perspective in which, like individuals in other marginalized groups, extremely tall and short women and men can identify the components of staturized culture and heightism. Stigmatized individuals monitor the interactional significance of their stigma largely because they accept hegemonic standards of normalcy and the normal self. Otherwise, sigma would have little effect on interactions or identity. Goffman ([1963] 1986, 32) explains, "One phase of this socialization process is that through which the stigmatized person learns and incorporates the standpoint of the normal, acquiring thereby the identity beliefs of the wider society and a general idea of what it would be like to possess a particular stigma." The consequences of such internalization are twofold: first, the stigmatized individual uses strategies to pass or minimize the stigma symbol in interactions, and, second, the stigma becomes part of the stigmatized

individual's understand of the self. Often, the height of extremely tall and short persons represents a social deficit that they have to overcome in order to minimize the dehumanizing aspects of staturization. Because height is the first characteristic that others notice about the tallest and shortest men and women, they often have to counteract the breadth of staturized symbolism that overwhelms people's perceptions of them before they can interact on a more peer level. Until then, tall and short people know they are perceived primarily through cultural meanings of tallness and shortness.

After a lifetime of experiencing staturized culture, non-normally statured persons can utilize their outsider perspective to identify how heightism shapes their interactions, opportunities, relationships, and social experiences. Tallness, for example, has its own set of predictable experiences and inconveniences. Jill, 6'2", explained "I always feel a sense of camaraderie with taller people, especially in uncomfortable places." Other tall people share experiences, versus "sometimes it's difficult for people to understand normal day-to-day things that really impact my life. I feel like sometimes people don't understand that." Noah, 6'8", stated, "In reality I don't think most people understand how much tall people have in common or struggle with their height and feeling like an oddity." He described greeting two other tall men, who he estimated to be 6'10" and 7', when "I was walking through Costco the other and we kind of eyed each other. Just that, 'Hey you're tall, I'm tall, we'll give each other a nod.'" When Noah nodded at the other tall shoppers, they all acknowledged their shared perspective as outsiders in staturized culture. The three men struggle to fit their bodies in cars and planes, hit their heads on door frames, smile politely as someone comments on their height at the grocery store—but more than just the daily inconveniences of tallness, these men understand how staturization defines normalcy, attractiveness, and identities. Yet, the men did not commiserate over their experiences.

Noah explained, “Everyone around us was staring and I think there’s some sort of understanding around tall people that you never ask somebody how tall they are. You know they hear it all day. You don’t want to do it because you know they just want to live their life like a normal person.” For Noah, respecting each other’s threshold for the relentless comments and the staturization of their lives and identities was more important than connecting about their tallness.

This is not a homogenous perspective, but short and tall people experience enough similar forms of marginalization that their insights together can chart the logic of heightism. During his interview about how height influences his life and identity, Sean 5’5”, said, “I think it one way or another talked about most everything we talked about today. I’ve had conversations about my height with people before, whereas a 5’8” guy probably has not had too many conversations about any of those things related to his height.” Brian, 5’4”, compared his perspective as a short man with “helping me to get used to being an outlier in society.” He said, “One thing that my height helps me do is to have empathy toward other people who are in other situations where they’re considered outliers as well. I feel like I have a bond with them.” The tallest and shortest women and men can see the staturization of culture when the normally-statured can take the meanings of height for granted, much like how privilege functions for other advantaged groups.

Height and the Habitus: Staturized Lines of Action

The staturized habitus accompanies different staturized lines of action that short and tall people use to navigate the social world as non-normally statured bodies. These lines of action minimize the effect of non-normative height, mitigate the othering present in staturized actions, and reconcile personal identities with expectations of tall and short “personalities.” Chelsea, 5’, uses nicknames to demonstrate that she embraces the expectations of shortness. She calls herself “‘fun-sized,’ like a little candy bar.” When short and tall women and men make jokes about their

height, they can disarm the staturization within an interaction and have a more equal exchange.

Tall men and women often use quiet voices and unassuming postures to counteract the likely intimidation others feel in their presence. Shane, 6'10", said he has "kind of soften sometimes. I don't want to be intimidating. I don't want to be scary." Tall people are hyper-cognizant that their behaviors can seem aggressive due to their large bodies. Because these bodies also occupy positions in other social structures, non-normally statured persons may choose lines of action that reflect perceptions in those intersections. Paige, 6'3", stated, "Sometimes I do find myself shrinking back because being tall as a Black woman, you have to realize that people are already intimidated. We have stereotypes that we live with—I'm sure that you've heard 'angry Black woman.' And when you're tall, you can just imagine that they think that you're a monster."

Paige described sitting down in disagreements in order to appear less intimidating as a tall Black woman. She said, "When stuff happens in public, like if you don't get good customer service and anyone would be annoyed, I have to be extra nice because I don't want them to stereotype me or put me in the cast as, 'oh she's an angry *big* Black woman.'" The staturized habitus structures behavior and dispositions as tall and short persons incorporate mediating behaviors for their height into their styles of comportment.

When a tall or short person cannot avoid the influence of their height in conversations and public spaces, other strategies mitigate the awkwardness experienced in staturized interactions. A tall person may respond to the awkwardness through posture changes. Shane, 6'10", admitted he has "a tendency to shrink myself a bit" because "I was never one of those kids who wanted to be noticed. And so I think I probably did it in an effort to shrink myself down a little bit." Through "hunched" and "slumped" shoulders, Shane attempted to minimize the actual physical difference. However, Paul, 6'9", responded to awkwardness in staturized

interactions by obeying his mother's instructions to walk "belly and chest out." He said, "Sometimes I actually walk taller. If I'd hear people talking about it, that's when I walk taller. If you're going to talk behind my back then you're going to see how tall I really am." By emphasizing his tallness, Paul aimed to reject the awkwardness or self-consciousness that the staturized interaction could make. Yet refuting the awkwardness reaffirms the interactional salience of height as much as other strategies of avoiding the situation or modifying bodily posture. Another way of responding to the staturization of interactions and public space is ignoring the comments and stares, conceptualizing the staturization of public life as white noise. Paige, 6'3", "tunes it out." She explains how the comments and stares are so common that they become unnoticed:

"The other day I was at church, and someone walked by and they saw me and my sisters, and they were like, 'Oh my gosh you're so beautiful and tall.' And we said 'thank you' and she went away. And someone else was like, 'Gosh, do you guys get tired of hearing that you are pretty and tall?' And we looked at each other and we thought about what he said, and we were like, 'No, we are so used to it that we just say thank you.' We get it so much. I get it so much, that 'you're tall, you're tall, you're tall, you're tall,' that it doesn't register when I hear it. I just kind of block it out. I remember one time I was traveling with a friend and every woman in the airport was staring, and she's like, 'Dang, do you feel these people staring?' And I'm like, 'No, I tune it out.' I don't see it because I'm so used to it. It happens every day."

Height shapes the daily lives of the very tall and short, particularly interactionally, and they respond with different strategies to minimize the staturization of their experiences. Of course, individuals have myriad feelings about and strategies for interacting with strangers in public. It is the commonality of the intensity in non-normally statured persons' emotional reactions to the staturization of their interactions throughout daily life that highlights the boundaries around normal height within a staturized culture.

If the situation emphasizes the usually negative connotations of shortness or tallness, then understandably someone may choose to avoid it. Many tall people, for example, choose to avoid

concerts because they feel guilty about imposing on others' view. Other settings present emotional pressure for short people. Austin, 5'5", stated, "I try to avoid circles at all times because your voice won't be heard. It's crazy. People talk up. It's not embarrassing, but if you say something and someone doesn't hear you, it's like 'I'm not going to do that again. I'm not going to put myself in that position.'" Brian, 5'4", explained that he often avoids public spaces when he does not want to exert the additional work of managing staturized interactions. "You know that you have to prove yourself every time you go into some situations being a short guy," Brian said. "You know that. But sometimes you just don't have the energy. You don't want to do extra work." Brian often avoids mundane social situations, choosing to pay for his gas at the pump and ignore his thirst rather than go inside the gas station. Brian dodges these scenarios because "people have a way of ignoring you if you're short. Often customers who come in after you will get served before you, especially at bars and things like that. Tall people will just reach over you with their money, reach right over your head. I don't think they're doing it on purpose." Yet being "ignored a lot dealing with salespeople, things like that" makes Brian "a little gun shy about going into stores." Brian described a common emotional state of anxiety or dread for extremely short and tall men and women to occasionally avoid public spaces when they do not wish to perform the emotion work necessitated by the staturization of interactions in public.

Very tall and very short men and women incur the additional duties of emotion work as they manage the reactions of normally-statured individuals to the presence of short and tall bodies. Non-normal height attends particular emotions for short and tall persons as they experience exclusion or interactional signifiers of difference. Veronica, 5'10", recounts: "It's weird because people definitely do comment more about the way my height makes *them feel* than the way my height reflects on me. I've often gotten comments about 'Veronica makes me

feel short,' which is kind of a weird thing because I don't think of people who are shorter than me as making me feel tall." Sometimes the emotional reactions of others, primarily new acquaintances, remains within the confines of uncomfortable small talk. Yet occasionally very tall and very short people observe interactions escalate due to the ways that stature colors relationships, especially considering the conflation of height and masculinity. Brian, 5'4", explained, that regularly in the middle of otherwise innocuous conversations, "sometimes you're just correcting a math problem and then you're about to get in a fight." The transformation of seemingly objective conversations into personal and emotional challenges demonstrates the evocative—and therefore significantly symbolic regarding authority, worth, privilege, and normalcy—power of height. Thus, the tall and short must manage these incidences with emotion work. Many short and tall women and prepare to deal with the influence of their height on the interaction. Austin, 5'5", described one common strategy for minimizing the impact of height when meeting strangers: "Usually I acknowledge that I'm short so we can get that out of the way." By initiating the dialogue, Austin hopes to apprehend the discussion over his height and limit the degree to which his shortness influences the interaction. He explained, "Short people don't want to sit there and talk about it. If I'm making jabs at myself, just like 'my short ass can't reach that,' I think it prevents people from thinking they can jab at me or make everyone else laugh about it." Yet this strategy may not always prove effective and can create another layer of emotional stress for short and tall people in public life. This creates an extra burden of emotion work as very tall and very short women and men must manage their own emotions and the emotional reactions their statures evoke from strangers.

“THE TALL AND SILENT TYPE”: INTERNALIZED DISPOSITIONS OF TALL AND SHORT WOMEN AND MEN

Negotiating Preconceptions of Short and Tall Personalities

Height influences the experiences and dispositions of extremely short and tall people to the extent that we can conceive of a “staturized habitus.” Bourdieu’s habitus both mediates the structure/field through a set of internalized dispositions and shapes and produces the field through relations and the improvisation of agents. The deluge of staturization in short and tall people’s engagement with social life and public spaces provides feedback about their identities in others’ reactions. The extent of height’s influence on interactions foregrounds shortness and tallness in non-normally statured persons’ identities. Shane, 6’10”, said that his height is “the first descriptor I use when people ask me to talk about myself. ‘Tell me about yourself.’ ‘Oh, I’m 6’10”.’ I feel like it’s a big deal.” Shane described leading with his height in conversations with new people in order for “people to start to view everything else about my life through that filter and then it might make more sense.” The “filter” that Shane references that height affects his daily life to the degree that his tallness becomes conflated with his identity. Paul, 6’9”, explained, “My height is part of my identity. It’s part of who I am. It’s not the main thing, but it is one of the defining characteristics of my identity both outside with other people but also for me as well.” This accumulates in the creation of the staturized habitus, which denotes the temperaments and personalities at the intersection of height and identity. Shortness and tallness accompany expectations about personalities and predictable lines of actions for navigating the symbolic meanings of height. The tall and short internalize these staturized expectations and strategies as dispositions.

The meanings of tallness and shortness on the self—the associations between tall people and competence, seriousness, maturity, and presence as well as between short people and cuteness, meekness, youth, and incompetence—generate expectations about *who* non-normally

statured people are. Rather than the biological consequence of tallness or shortness's influence on personality, tall and short people align or reject these expectations by fulfilling corresponding or opposing characteristics. This information about who they "are," gained through staturized interactions, combines with the experiences of negotiating social life and the built environment as non-normally people into a staturized habitus. This might mean tall people may capitalize on the tendency of taller bodies to dominate social interactions, like Courtney, 6'1". Courtney explained, "I may have wanted to be the center of attention if I wasn't tall, but I think that that definitely helped me to get some of that, to present myself as the jock, as the athlete kid." Noah, 6'8", "became more outgoing because of my height" as he grew accustomed to strangers approaching him. Certainly, shortness and tallness effect interactions and identities differently, but nonetheless height shapes dispositions for both short and tall persons. Many short women developed a characteristic of defiance in response to others' misconceptions about their intellect and abilities. Similarly, Brian, 5'4", said that his shortness has "given me a lot of confidence because you're used to being doubted from the time people look at you. They equate everything you do negatively with this one trait about you." Many short and tall men and women deliberately cultivate characteristics opposite to the preconceptions about their personality. Ryan, 6'6", described himself as "a very, very laid-back person," a characteristic that he said "comes with the territory of being tall." Because he anticipates that new acquaintances will "always draw some sort of conclusions" from "physical characteristics," Ryan immediately attempts to demonstrate the range of his personality in order to "lay down the law as to 'this is Ryan.'" Their disavowal represents an important part of the staturized habitus as these rejections indicate the presence of the staturized habitus as they push against its structure.

Short and tall people encounter messages about who they are “supposed” to be. Sean, 5’5”, explained that his height “is sort of forced on my identity.” The salience of his height in public spaces, “especially if you’re going out” when his height is the constant subject with “clubbing sort of guys, overly masculine.” Therefore, Sean explained, “With short jokes, you can’t be combative with that or you have ‘short man syndrome.’ You have to embrace it and either be funnier than them or just be like, ‘Whatever.’ It doesn’t do you any good to not cannibalize it into your identity.” Austin, 5’5”, pointed to the dominance of the idea of the “short man syndrome” in characterizing short men’s personality. In school, peers “would say they thought I was a dick, but then they met me and they realized I was nothing like that at all.” Austin explained that although he had positive interactions with classmates, “people thought I had short man syndrome. That’s what I would feel all the time. They thought I had something to prove or I was real aggressive. I’m usually reserved. I’m not outgoing. I think they mistook that for me being a dick.” Some styles of comportment are easier lines of action if they coincide with the symbolic meanings of tallness or shortness, and so tall and short people may incorporate those behaviors into their personalities. Rachel, a 6’ high school teacher in an urban school, stated, “I am so assertive maybe it does have a lot to do with my height. I have parents on me all the time: ‘I don’t really like your tone.’ I don’t know what to tell you because this is how I talk. I just think of it as I have a strong personality, but I’m sure it’s easier to have a strong personality when I’ve got six feet of asshole to put behind it.” Yet Rachel also described how the expectations about who she is as a tall women leave out and minimize other aspects of her personality. She said one of the “disadvantages” is that people assume she never cries: “If something happens to one of my dogs, that is the end of the world. I am very sensitive about stuff that probably people wouldn’t give me any credit for because here I am, this big in-your-

face kind of girl.” Despite their actual personalities, non-normally statured people’s behaviors butt against the expectations for how tall or short people “should” act or be. When Chelsea, 5’, started her first job as a teenager, her supervisor responded to her boisterous personality by saying, “‘I really didn’t expect this from you.’ And I was like, ‘Oh why not?’ And they couldn’t put their finger on it. I knew it was because of how I looked, because I was small.” Socializing messages to women and men reflect that staturization of gender on the grounds of who they are “supposed” to be as gendered persons. Because, Veronica argued, “women are taught that taking up *less* space is a good thing and men are taught that taking up *more* space is a good thing,” tallness and shortness designate different ways of living for women. Veronica said, “Being tall from a female perspective is something that you have to learn to tailor your personality a little bit to match your height because you’re going to take up more space regardless so you might as well do something with it.” Height and gender intersect at the site of personality prescriptions. Veronica continued, “I think also women are taught that their height has a connection to their personality. I know a lot of shorter women who are meeker and milder and I think a lot of that has to do with the fact that they’ve always been treated like children.” Whether short and tall women and men alter their dispositions toward or against the expectations about their identities, they know that staturized boundaries rest on the conflation of height and identity.

The Structuring Force of the Staturized Habitus

In addition to anxiety about navigating staturized interactions and dealing with the built environment and mass-produced material culture, short and tall persons’ enhanced self-consciousness in public spaces reflects their internalization of height norms and the incorporation of height norms into their senses of self. Many people of any height may feel self-conscious, but the reported perception of increased nervousness and general sense of embodied uneasiness for extremely tall and short women and men in society demonstrates the symbolic importance of

height in our culture. Tall women particularly reported enhanced self-consciousness as part of adolescence because they cannot access the typical duration of childhood nor the chance to physically blend into their peers. Rachel, 6', described how she carries around her tall 12-year-old niece because she recalls being denied that element of childhood herself. She said, "At such a young age, people would say to you, 'Honey, I can't pick you up, you're too big for that.' But she was still a little kid. So I would hoist her ass up and carry her around until her feet were dragging on the ground because that is one thing I remember where I was like, 'Oh this is bad.' I still wanted to be picked up and carried around." For tall women, the awkwardness of growing up centered on their tallness as a physical marker of difference. Lori, 5'11", argued that "standing out" contributed to her sense of self-consciousness. She explained, "Being shy was the biggest outcome of being tall. And just being so self-conscious that everybody was looking at you or that you kind of always stood out." Paige, 6'3", conveyed the emotional state of feeling especially surveilled in adolescence and how she responded by trying to minimize her presence in other ways, such as through clothes and demeanor. She said, "I already had the insecurity of being taller than everyone else. You feel kind of weird. And you can't hide when you're tall." Paige described how her tallness rendered her permanently exposed in a life stage when she wished to escape scrutiny:

"I'm 6'3" now, but I think I was about 6' in middle school. Elementary school, I think that I was 5'7", 5'8", which is pretty tall for elementary school. So you have struggles. You don't fit in. You always stand out. You want to hide. You can't hide. Of course we were teased about it. Jolly Green Giant—I was called the Jolly Black Giant. That's what my nickname was. Childhood, growing up was very, very, very painful, growing up as a tall girl. The memories that I do remember all associate with not fitting in, my fashion. I never had the nice clothes or the right clothing because it was too short. I couldn't wear what other people were wearing. Those are the ones that I really remember. I always remember trying to hide, put my head down, not be conspicuous, not really stand out. But it never worked. I'm tall. Not being too loud. I don't want to be too loud because that draws attentions to me. I don't want to wear bright colors because that draws attention to me. I just want to blend in with everyone else."

Tall women's adolescent experiences of self-consciousness may be similar to many girls' experiences at that time in their life and development. Yet tall women expressed that their height increased self-consciousness as children and preteens. Regardless of whether they experienced "more" self-consciousness, the cultural significance of height norms colored the experience of adolescent self-consciousness for tall women.

The staturized habitus also shapes life trajectories as certain occupations and choices are more or less likely for short and tall individuals to pursue. Tall men and women who were college athletes chose their universities based on sports, and most of them knew they would not have played if they were shorter. Noah, 6'8", explained that without a swimming scholarship to a Division II college, he would have attended a nearby state school, altering his connections and career choices. Paul, 6'9", said for tall men in Brazil "the expectation" that they play sports is so strong that everyone assumes they will "go to Europe to play basketball or go back to Brazil to play basketball." Paul expected the same, but an injury changed his plans. Professionally, tall men *and* women feel they are more likely to be hired for a position because they are memorable and their height conveys competency, power, and trustworthiness. Paige, 6'3", said, "I feel like my height has been looked at even over my qualifications. From my appearance automatically people assume 'she can handle a job, she's got it.' They might not even read my resume, they might not even talk to me, but they just assume I've got it. I think it's actually helped me a lot."

Many short persons, conversely, find their height to be a professional obstacle. Danielle, 4'11", entered the military on a height waiver yet could not fulfill the height requirements of her desired position and had to work a different job because she was not tall enough to drive the trucks. Many tall persons are aware that they interview well—but short people also know that their height, conversely, can negatively affect their employment prospects. Brian, 5'4", said, "At

an interview I'm at a disadvantage just by showing up." Melanie, 4'10", reported that she "didn't get hired for a job because of my height, which legally I know they cannot do but I found out through a friend" who worked in the chiropractor's office where she applied as a massage therapist. The chiropractor, her friend told her, "did not hire me because he felt like because of my height, then I would not be able to perform as well as someone that was taller. That really bothered me." Perceived physical limitations may affect hiring decisions, but short people contend that others' implied assumptions about their abilities hinder their employment success. Dennis, 5'5", recalled a 6' tall applicant chosen for a position as a principal of an elementary school instead of Dennis. When the man left the position after a year and the school hired Dennis, he asked them why he had not initially been hired him. The administrators replied, "He made a better first impression." Dennis said that their response was code that "my answers were as good but my impression wasn't as good as the other gentlemen's. I'm assuming height would have something to do with that." The staturized habitus not only shapes how non-normally statured persons interact with the world but also structures how their lives unfold by making certain life choices more or less likely.

Without the recognition that staturized microaggressions are symptomatic of a larger process of inequality, short and tall women and men must cope with these comments without acknowledgement of heightism as recourse. Heightism is unrecognized as a process of inequality. Alexis said, "If you go and say anything about it, people go and say that you're too sensitive and it's not a big issue." Because heightism remains unrecognized, extremely short and extremely tall women and men have little recourse against these staturized physical and verbal microaggressions—as well as the other components of height-based discrimination. Brian, 5'4", explained, "Our whole life we've been told, don't talk about it. If we speak out about it then

were told that we have a problem. We shouldn't be speaking. You're just complaining. It takes more confidence to confront this than it does to put on the shelf and on the back burner." As an anti-heightism activist, he explained, "In the anti-heightism movement, we're still in an education phase. We still have to convince people that heightism is a real thing because people think that we're just whining and trying to get special treatment or something. That's usually what we confront." Like many other forms of inequality, societal recognition of the cultural patterns of thought and attitudes that shape the treatment of tall and short women and men lags the identification of those patterns by the marginalized persons themselves. Heightism remains further unsubstantiated because staturized culture is so inscribed on the body and naturalized as innate difference. Sean, 5'5", tired of his roommate joking about his height, told him, "'Don't dig me about that. I'm short and you say this same point every day. Something's got to give because I've been this height all year.'" His friend replied with "something along the lines of 'go back to your tree, Keebler elf.'" Sean retorted with a similar statement based on his roommate's race, despite that he knew his racial comment was inappropriate and hurtful:

"I was trying and hoping that he would feel bad because he would realize that I was 5'5" because I was born like that and he was Black because he was born like that. Most people wouldn't see it that way, probably even though that is it. Obviously for me to say something hurtful sucks. I really only said it because I felt like there is an accurate parallel. It didn't hurt our friendship or anything. I'm still friends with him. I always remember it because I don't like racism, and I'm a middle-class white guy who grew up in the suburbs with a liberal arts education so I've had it pretty easy for the most part. I can see how heightism could be an -ism if you wanted it to be. Not that I'm seeking a protective status."

Obviously Sean regrets his exchange of microaggressions with his friend, and one discriminatory remark never warrants another. On reflection, the parallel Sean wished for his friend to acknowledge was that both of their comments rely upon cultural logics of inequality: racism and heightism. However, Sean knew that most people would not perceive heightism as a process of inequality because it remains one of our society's lingering forms of legitimized inequality.

CONCLUSION

Bourdieu argues that the habitus is the meeting of structural constraints and agentic choices. The staturized habitus refers to the internalized dispositions of tall and short people according to the cultural significance of their height and the strategies of navigating the symbolic meanings of tallness and shortness. The habitus is “structured” in that it is determined by the field and position in it, a “structure” in that it is embodied capital, and it “structures” by presenting a predictable set of lines of action that reproduce and alter the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The staturized habitus is “structured” by staturized culture and the varied meanings of height for tall men and women or short men and women. It is a “structure” by providing different degrees of embodied capital for normally- and non-normally statured women and men. And the staturized habitus generates height-specific lines of action for short and tall people in social interactions, public spaces, and relationships. Fundamental to the staturized habitus are “microaggressions,” the interactional enforcement of staturized boundaries through comments that marginalize the non-normally statured. These interactions shape the lines of action and internalized dispositions of the very short and the very tall as they adjust and adapt to navigating these statements and the sense of accumulated harassment as staturized microaggressions characterize their daily lives.

Similar to the emotional processes of policing symbolic boundaries between groups of bodies—most notably through gender, race, class, ability, and sexual orientation—the meanings of height and the staturization of culture accompany and evoke intense emotions for very short and very tall men and women. Staturized microaggressions, the interactional enforcement of these staturized boundaries by short and tall individuals as well as onlookers, riddle daily life for individuals outside of the range of “normal” height. Short and tall men and women expect the staturization of their interactions, anticipate that height influences their conversations with

others—especially normally-statured persons—and respond with myriad emotionally-charged strategies. Some may revel in the sense of specialness, others may experience jealousy toward persons they encounter as their difference becomes salient relationally in public life. Names and jokes may offend or annoy short and tall women and men, and they often feel anger, frustration, and hurt in response to the constant invasion of height into their public interactions. Often, their emotional experiences respond to the communicated or perceived emotional reactions of others to their own height because tall and short people assume strangers see their bodies as odd or nonconforming. Tall and short persons' emotional responses, specifically through increased self-consciousness and anger, reveals how charged and effective these boundaries are. The emotional load of staturized interactions on short and tall persons indicates the power of staturized boundaries. Often unintentionally and unconsciously, normally-statured persons maintain the symbolic boundaries around normal height by reminding short and tall people of their symbolic and physical difference. The interactional policing—intentional or not—of staturized symbolic boundaries fashions extremely short and tall persons' emotional responses of anger and hurt to public interactions.

The differences in individuals' physical heights shapes interactions, symbolic boundaries, and internalized dispositions of non-normally statured persons because normally-statured, short, and tall are not only qualifications of inches but *social categories*. Height marks one way that we sort persons into groups, and these categories carry symbolic significance of how we expect members to act and who we expect them to be. These expectations merge with the import of height in tall and short persons' identities through the staturized habitus. As non-normally statured individuals internalize these expectations as dispositions, they reflect the meanings of tallness and shortness as social categories in their lines of action. Thinking of themselves through

the lens of staturization and anticipating how their height influences interactions, the tall and short choose lines of actions that fit the staturized habitus. Tall and short persons do so in relation to each other and to the normally-statured as reflect the social categories of height. Significantly, while most social categories that we use to make these generalizations have corresponding social movements or cultural criticism, height does not—yet non-normal stature informs our assumptions about personality and character as much as these other categories.

CHAPTER 5

HEIGHTIST IMAGERY OF DESIRE: STATURIZED TYPOLOGIES OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY

“Tall, dark, and handsome”—easy words, even a cliché, to describe an idealized male attractiveness. Yet this ideal serves more than to shape our concepts of desirability—this ideal of the tall man as attractive upholds the taller-man norm, the cultural preference for heterosexual pairs comprised of a man taller than the woman. The taller-man norm has a definitive influence—if not determining power—on our coupling choices. Non-conforming couples are regularly reminded that their matches fail this tenet of heterosexual romance by disrupting our expectations of masculinity and femininity naturalized by height. I use the term “taller-man norm” rather than “shorter-woman norm” because this norm supports hegemonic masculinity by conferring status to taller men—who fulfil the bodily requirements of hegemonic masculinity through their tallness—but not necessarily to shorter women despite their achievement of femininity through possessing a smaller body. Although representing gender conformity, a small female body can intensify the problems in the lower-status gender position for short women. Thus, the taller-man norm reifies the gender power differential through staturized imagery of desire and preserves essentialized gender despite whether the individuals behave in conventionally masculine or feminine ways. As justifications for gender inequality appear increasingly unfounded, the taller-man norm naturalizes conventional femininity and masculinity by constraining personal preferences toward conforming partners because their bodies represent the achievement of appropriate gender.

Scholarly research utilizing height as a variable deploys the same evolutionary, economic, and personality determinism that naturalizes the taller-man norm without questioning the cultural stakes of this organizing principle of gender and sexuality. This research asserts that

most people select a partner based on the taller-man norm or some other evaluative framework that considers height (see Pawłowski 2003). Courtiol et al (2010) state that individuals adhere to the taller-man norm based on genetic qualifiers. Mueller and Mazur (2001, 309) assert that women desire to mate with tall men in order to have taller, and therefore higher-status, children. Tallness represents a cornerstone of hegemonic masculinity, taken-for-granted in this research as a natural, evolutionarily preferable trait. What the taller-man norm research shows us is not that heterosexual women “naturally” desire taller men and men “naturally” desire shorter women but rather that the taller-man norm pervades our cultural ideas about attractiveness, coupling, and romance to the extent that height serves as a fundamental organizing principle of sexuality.

The staturization of gender relies on the disbursement of bodily capital, as bodies that align with constructions of gender appear more naturally—and therefore legitimately—gender-conformant and experience the rewards associated with that appearance through intersecting processes of both gender and height. The body can be a site of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986, 244). Through the concept of bodily capital, or how embodied differences come to have meaning as well as how the symbolic economy of those differences map social relations and boundaries and how bodily capital is symbolically valued, we can see some of the ways in which physical differences maintain inequality and the processes and meanings involved in sustaining those distinctions (Martin and George 2006, 126; Wacquant 1995, 65). Bodies come to have value through social processes, such as the role of connections and the economy in fashion models’ popularity (Mears 2011). In order to access bodily capital, individuals must communicate that they embody—both in appearance and behavior (as expressions of the self)—a culturally legitimated gender, because, as Skeggs (2004, 24 emphasis in original) explains, “gender can be a form of cultural capital but only *if* it is symbolically *legitimated*.” To fulfill these conditions of

gender, the individual must discipline the body to dominant notions of femininity and masculinity, which uphold the boundaries between men and women (Foucault [1976] 1990). For tall men and short women, their ease of adherence to the taller-man norm and masculine and feminine bodies, respectively, allocates body capital and gender credibility in situations valuing dominant cultural norms of gender and sexuality.

In addition to ascribing height-based versions of sexuality, the staturization of gender designates typologies of style and gender aesthetics for tall and short women and men. In this chapter, I analyze how the taller-man norm organizes heterosexuality—including coupling, attractiveness, romance, and desire. I examine how the individualization of compliance as a “personal preference” for a culturally-sanctioned aesthetic or “feeling” venerates tall men as romantic partners for their embodiment of hegemonic masculinity and also rewards short women for their conforming bodies. However, short women gain gender credibility from their hyperfemininity, yet they cannot access some forms of masculine privilege. Next, I present the ways that short men and tall women, due to their shared incongruence of their bodies with gender ideals, face desexualization or fetishization. Tall women can lose gender credibility, but gain access to types of power often denied to women. Finally, I present gendered thresholds of normalcy navigated by non-normally statured men *and* women. I show that couples who most adhere to the taller-man norm, extremely tall men paired with extremely short women, nonetheless experience physical awkwardness that leads many to reject taller *women* and shorter *men*. In conclusion, I argue that the processes of staturization, seemingly more biologically determined and therefore ahistorical because of height’s permanence, quietly justifies essentialist perspectives within which short and tall women and men craft gender and sexual identities.

“LOOKING UP INTO HIS EYES”: PREFERRING THE TALLER-MAN NORM

Rather than an evolutionary imperative or an innate desirability, the taller-man norm is a social rule of heteronormative sexual coupling that enforces gender. Like other cultural norms, the taller-man norm regulates behavior by rewarding conformity (through avoiding scrutiny as well as fulfilling the embodied romance practices that assume a larger man and smaller woman) and supports the gender framework by associating desirability with bodies affirming idealized masculinity and femininity. An anti-heightism activist, Brian, 5'4", connected women and men's sexual beliefs about shortness to cultural symbolism regarding height. The ubiquity of staturized imagery within cultural representations of heterosexual romance results in, Brian argued, women and men “conditioned by Disney and everyone else with the Prince Charming fantasy that women have to look up into his eyes.” This imagery translates into staturized sexual and gender practices as women (and men) evaluate partners with these relational height standards. Brian continued, “Everyone has the right to their own body and who they offer it to. I'm not disrespecting that. It's the marginalization for a physical trait and the fact that with this high heels thing—that ‘oh I can't be taller than you in heels’—that's considered the right thing to do in society to a large degree. That bothers me.” Clearly, women choose partners for much more important reasons than footwear—but their reliance on heels as one of the justifications for choosing partners demonstrates the role of our taken-for-granted cultural representations of height in sexuality.

In a culture permeated by staturized sexuality, short and tall men and women experience pressure to adhere to the taller-man norm culturally and interactionally. During his interview, Sean, an Information Technology graduate student who is 5'5", suggested a focus group research project asking participants to evaluate the relationships of height-norm conforming and nonconforming couples to confirm what Sean already knew: we perceive heterosexual couples

conforming to the taller-man norm as happier and healthier. He said, “Have people weigh in or make assumptions about a tall woman with a short guy and a tall guy with a short woman. ‘How do you think their sex life is in a scale of 1 to 10? Do think they get along really well?’ I guarantee you they will be skewed toward the tall guy and short woman.” The taller-man norm eliminates prospective partners based on height as a primary selection standard. Sean explained, “For the most part there is an unspoken not rule—maybe rule—where I’m not going to date anyone taller than me. For the longest time I never considered it as a possibility.” The “unspoken maybe rule” that Sean described—the taller-man norm—determines whether he considers a woman as a potential partner above most other factors. Due to this cultural rule, Sean admitted that he is more likely decide to approach women if they are shorter than him despite that he may be more attracted to a different woman. Yet Sean explained, “I don’t think that’s due just to the fact that she’s taller than me as much as I know that there’s sort of a perception that women don’t date men shorter than them. I know that is the prevalent line of thought in American culture.” Sean’s decision to approach someone uses the taller-man norm as an evaluative tool relying on “more the cultural expectation opposed to the reality that she’s three inches taller than me.” Thus, the *meaning* of their height difference determines whether Sean will try to initiate a sexual relationship more than the physical height difference than from staturized sexuality.

Women in my study—both short and tall—affirm that height shapes the initial contact between potential partners. Because men often initiate flirtatious interactions according to sexual dating scripts, their preconceptions about height can determine how and whom they approach. For women, this means the men who flirt with them use the schema of staturized gender sexuality throughout the interaction. Katherine, a shorter than average woman, explained, “I find that I get hit on by short men a lot, like a lot more than an average size, like a 5’6” woman,

would get hit on by a short man. Probably just because men like to date somebody who is shorter than them.” However, Jill, taller than the average woman at 6’2”, finds her height to be subject to contestation for men who, during their flirtations, insist that Jill is under 6’. She stated, “Men tend to balk at the idea that I am that tall, especially when I’m being hit on or being pursued by a potential suitor. They will say, ‘Oh no, *I’m 6’2”*.’ It’s kind of awkward when you’re sitting down and you’re telling someone how tall you are and they don’t believe you and you stand up and they’re shorter than you are and you catch them in a lie.” In addition to the unthinkability of a woman taller than 6’ according to the taller-man norm, the resistance Jill encounters indicates that often the body of a taller woman nullifies the possibility of coupling despite whether the man was initially attracted.

Many very tall and very short women and men rationalize their conformance to the taller-man norm as “personal preference” despite their identification of the social process of staturized sexuality as a cultural phenomenon rather than a biological imperative. The individualization of height preference in light of short and tall women’s awareness of the artificiality of these preferences shows how thoroughly the taller-man norm naturalizes heterosexual romance. Although Austin, 5’5”, explained that he was “not saying it’s impossible for me to date a woman who’s taller than me,” he was less likely to be interested in taller women because of what he thought was “a natural thing” of his personal preference. Courtney, 6’1”, explained, “I’m just more attracted to taller guys.” She continued, “It’s not that I have a rule I wouldn’t date shorter guys.” Instead, her conformity to the taller-man norm reflected an internalization of that norm as personal preference. As Bourdieu (2004, 166) describes, the habitus as “necessity internalized,” and many tall women (as well as non-normally statured persons in every quadrant) find their preferences are “converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-

giving perceptions” according to staturized sexuality. Some tall women were more forthright about their height standards for partners. Rachel, 6’, who prefers men “the taller the better,” stated, “I always have said that for me it’s hands, teeth, and height. They’re all completely superficial but I’m okay with that.” Many participants dismissed their height preferences as items on a checklist of “types”; but unlike teeth, hands, eye color, or other usual physical characteristics that a person might desire in a partner, only height reflects a process of sorting people into groups—yet lacks the social recognition to render this exclusionary preference in poor taste. Robin, a 5’11” gay woman, asserted that “just like anybody whether you’re straight or gay, you have a type” and her type ranged from 5’4” to her own height. She explained that her preference for partners within those measurements reflects her own personal “prejudice”:

“I one time tried to date someone shorter. The person had a lovely personality and this is going to sound so bad, and I tell God, ‘Please, please, I’m sorry. I’m sorry I think this way.’ But she was 5’ tall. I couldn’t get beyond that. It was my problem, I’ll admit it. I don’t for some reason want anybody taller than me. Isn’t that weird? But yeah, 5’4” I’m comfortable with. Anything shorter, no. It’s just weird. It just doesn’t work for me. In a romantic relationship, I do have a prejudice against short people. There you go. But I’ve known that for a long time and I’ve resolved that I’ve got a problem.”

Robin’s comments suggest that staturized sexuality influences partnering and attraction beyond only heterosexual couples. Furthermore, Robin’s assertion that her preferences are *her* problem indicates the thorough naturalization of staturization sexuality through individualization. Sean, 5’5”, said he is “naturally attracted to women who are shorter than me,” but acknowledges that “I don’t see myself dating anyone over 6’. It’s just not going to happen. It has nothing to do with my wants and desires. It’s just not going to happen.” The taller-man norm, then, is the primary influence on Sean’s personal preferences to the extent that he internalizes the rules of staturized sexuality as his “natural” attraction. He explained, “There are these culturally imposed restrictions and it’s hard to tell where you draw the line between your preference and the

culturally imposed restriction. Even if you can find the line, how much did the restriction impose on you before you did find that line?” The determining power of the taller-man norm so shapes personal preferences as the processes of staturization and individual desires and converge.

As with all aspects of sexuality, the physical and biological create the basis for important and complicated symbolic meanings, which form our understandings of the body. The facticity of differently-statured bodies having sex occurs within staturized culture and we experience the juncture of the personal and the social through the patterning of desire. Exposed to heterosexual dating and romance norms in the U.S., we know that most man-woman couples include a taller man and smaller woman—and that defying this rule invites subtle to overt social scrutiny. One way that short *and* tall women experience the cultural organizing force of staturization is through enjoyment in the sensation of smallness in comparison to their mate. Alicia, 5’, stated, “I feel big so often because I’m short but fat. It’s nice to feel smaller in comparison. A tall really skinny guy wouldn’t really help, but a tall and average or even big guy is going to make me feel small, which isn’t something that I feel a lot. I like that feeling and someone who’s taller is more likely let me feel that way.” Similarly, most tall women do not “feel small” and seek to accomplish that in their romantic relationships. The importance of the sensation of relative smallness indicates the permeation of the symbolism of the taller-man norm into the embodied sensation of correlating “feeling small” with desire and love. Understandably, many heterosexual tall women—who rarely if at all experience the smallness associated with womanhood—particularly enjoy the relative smallness of partnering with a larger man. Leah, 6’3”, described preferring a taller boyfriend:

“My boyfriend is my height. He’s maybe got me by a quarter of an inch. It’s fantastic. I love it. The way that we met is through online dating. I posted a comment on a board having to do with tall women and what are people’s preferences. And my boyfriend commented on it and private messaged me. We got to talking and we met for coffee. It’s

corny. The rest is history. We joke around and we say that we get it. We joke that he's my 'My Size Boyfriend.' I found a tall man who likes tall ladies that aren't like models."

The pleasure Leah feels finally achieving a height-matched relationship reflects the staturized boundaries surrounding taller-man norm-conforming relationships.

Women are not the sole experiencers of physical comfort and pleasure embodied by adhering to the taller-man norm. Although male participants did not express the same degree of enjoyment in the body size difference of conforming relationships as short and tall women discussed, short women reported men's expression of appreciation for their smallness. Melanie, 4'11", acknowledged "positive aspects sexually" because "being short can be considered feminine which is cool. I know some guys really like short girls." She stated, "There aren't a lot of guys who would date taller women." By "feeling" naturally enjoyable through the internalization of staturized sexuality, short women's bodies thus represent a type of attractiveness that adheres to sexual norms. Amy, 5', described an ex-boyfriend who "definitely had a thing" for shorter women. Because "all of his ex-girlfriends were pretty short," Amy described herself as one in his "collection of short girls." Many men found her shortness desirable and "a lot of people think it's cute." Later, a different ex told her, "I love how short you are, you could just climb on me." Accustomed to this type of talk about her stature, Amy found the comments "fine until he said, 'I could just break you in half.' He meant it like, 'I could but I won't so I feel powerful.'" That, Amy said, "creeped me out." Like much of the rewards of staturized gender and sexuality for short women, the benefits of men's desire of their smaller bodies parallels a sexualized power differential that disadvantages short women as they represent vulnerability.

Tall women experience a loss of heterosexual romance, which, although potentially limiting for short women, assumes a smaller woman and a larger man. Lori, 5'11", explained

how media portrayals of romance preclude a taller female body: “You’re not very delicate if you’re tall. You have a lot more bone mass and you can’t be delicate. And so being delicate is in relation to being more feminine. If you’re in a dating relationship, if you’re tall, is he going to be able to pick you up very easily or carry you? Those are all kind of girly movie silly things, but as a teenager those are things that you think, oh that would be fun.” For Lori, and many tall women, a normal component of heterosexual romance excludes tall women, especially those in relationships with shorter men, from typical ways of expressing heterosexual romantic expression. Many situations emphasizing the taller-man aesthetic of heterosexual romance degender tall women because of their connotations of masculinity whose bodies appear to preclude the practices of romance—men hoisting women in the air, for example—or seem to disregard the symbolic cornerstone of romance—men’s protection of smaller women—as their largeness suggests they do not need men’s protection. Nonconforming relationships seem “weird and wrong” to Lindsey, 6’7”, because the taller-man norm imposes smallness as the satisfying physical experience for women in a sexual relationship. Lindsey explained that she ended a relationship with a 5’9” man because “kissing and holding hands, it’s not as smooth and it just feels weird for me to bend over to kiss a guy. It just feels weird and wrong. Otherwise, going out in public and all that, people stare anyway. That’s not an issue for me. It’s just getting over the intimacy part, which is hard.” The sexual and romantic imagery creates anxiety about instigating and maintaining relationships outside of the taller-man norm.

Tall women and short men occupy a symbolic space of gender-nonconformance, and they incur additional burdens of emotional labor to manage romantic and sexual relationships. Often, that emotional work centers on their own conceptions of heterosexual romantic behavior: kissing, hugging, hand-holding, and other ways of being a public romantic couple. Hochschild

(1979, 561) explained that “emotion work” involves “the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling.... ‘Emotion work’ refers to the effort...and not to the outcome, which may or may not be successful.” Ashley, 5’11”, stated, “I would always check with guys who are shorter than me. I’m like, ‘Is it okay that I’m taller?’ Maybe because I’m a social worker. ‘Does this make you uncomfortable?’ Most guys are pretty open about it: ‘No, I like tall girls. That’s the type of girl I like.’” In 6’ Rachel’s otherwise emotionally satisfying relationship with her 5’10” boyfriend who “loves how tall I am,” their nonconformity to height standards requires extra emotional labor as she manages her own feelings. Rachel said, “I don’t want to hold hands or anything in public because I feel like I look like this monster next to him. And I’m like, ‘That’s nice. Keep it down, I’m going to put flats on because this looks ridiculous.’ I’m always like, ‘Come here. Come on, I’m going to pick you up.’ He’s like, ‘That’s not funny.’ It really is though.” Because of the reliance of heterosexual romance on imagery of taller men, Rachel is reluctant to participate in romantic behaviors with her shorter boyfriend. Despite his appreciation of her tallness, their nonconformity creates tension as Rachel would prefer a relationship conforming to the taller-man norm. Deviance from the taller-man norm can inject tension into nonconforming relationships. Certainly all relationships involve a degree of conflict, and many romantic relationships are unhealthy regardless of the influence of staturized culture.

Veronica, 5’10”, explained how height shaped the dysfunction in a previous relationship:

“In my adult life, I’ve only dated one guy who was significantly shorter than me and it was a constant source of consternation. Any time I would wear any sort of heel or whatever you wear going out, it was meant to make him look silly. Having to purposefully change the way I behaved or things like that because of that. I think that had a lot to do with him as a person, but it’s definitely impacted my dating decisions. I have specifically not dated guys I liked because they were significantly shorter than me. And partially just because I felt awkwardly large.”

The conflict in their relationship centered on a touchstone of staturized culture—heels—and shaped their emotional relationship. By objecting to her heels as an exaggerator of their deviance, Veronica's ex-boyfriend reified the sexualized cultural boundaries around romantic relationships. Furthermore, Veronica's aversion to the sense of feeling large as a woman led her to avoid relationships with shorter men. The staturization of sexuality, which manifests in the emotional responses to the ideas about height-normal and -deviant relationships and to cultural imagery of heterosexual romance, encourages individual persons to police their own relationships according to height norms.

Although constructions of staturized sexuality rely on heteronormativity, the physical realities of differently sized bodies engaging in sexual acts influences how persons of different heights have sex. Melanie, 4'11", explained, "If there's a height difference between my partner and me, obviously there are some things that I can't do sexually." Even for heterosexual couples who fit the taller-male-smaller-woman norm, height impacts how persons engage in sex acts. Melissa, 4'10", said, "He's a lot taller than I am so sex can be a little awkward sometimes trying to adjust and move and figure things out when you first get started just because of the height difference. There's some positions that we cannot do because of my height." In my research, partners talked about the process of adjusting their behavior, and they discussed how to accommodate the practicalities of differently-sized bodies having sex. Veronica, 5'10", described having sex with "quite a few guys who are significantly shorter than me. And it's definitely weird. Just think about the anatomy of it." Because of the influence of her tallness on her sex life, Veronica either avoided having sex with a shorter man if she felt uncomfortable despite if "I would've under normal circumstances hooked up with that person, I would choose not to if I thought that it was going to be weird." With shorter male partners, Veronica initiated

conversations because, as she said, “You have to be able to talk about it. You have to deal to have a conversation about ‘hey, this is more comfortable with you being four inches shorter than me.’” Thus, Veronica identified her sex life as “an area of my life where I’ve been more comfortable talking about my height than I would necessarily in a day-to-day interaction. You almost have to have ownership of your height to make sex an enjoyable experience for you.” As Veronica detailed, sex is different for short and tall people, depending on the height of their partner. Because of these physical realities, most tall and short women and men incorporate discussions about height and sex into their sexual relationships.

(NOT) PICKING HIM UP: SHORT MEN IN THE “FRIEND ZONE”

Those who partner against the taller-man norm do so with a calculus of symbolic meanings of height, gender, and staturized culture as they confront, manipulate, and reject or accept the staturized imagery of heterosexual romance. Short men know that the taller-man norm reduces their dating pool as they may not be considered by taller women. When he served in the Navy in the late 1950s, Dennis, 5’5”, recounted calling a woman he “heard talking with another person and she sounded like a really nice girl,” and phoned her himself. Assuming he would never meet her, Dennis told the woman that he was “about 6 feet tall, maybe about 180 pounds, dark wavy hair.” When she agreed to “going out for a Coke,” Dennis hung up and “panicked.” He said, “I put things in my shoes, anything I could do to get half an inch.” The woman answered the door on the evening of their date and said, “‘You lied to me didn’t you?’ She was, I’m guessing 5’10” or 5’11”. Just a lovely young lady. And I said, ‘Yes I did.’” Forgiven, Dennis and the woman “developed a really nice friendship” and “when I would come into town, I would call her and we would go for a Coke.” Although he did not recall her name, Dennis remembered “meeting that young lady and her graciousness and not letting my untruthfulness be a barrier to friendship.” Friendship is often the desexualized role designated for short men. Brian, 5’4”,

exposed the how the taller-man norm carries more importance than our ideas of abstract love. He likened the staturized romantic sorting process to ordering dinner: “A lot of women have an actual cut off. They’ll say, ‘You have to be 5’9½.” Are you measuring people? Are you buying fish? ‘I’ll take 3 pounds of tarpon.’ You’re trying to meet a soulmate, you’re not buying fish.” As Brian articulated, adherence to the taller-man norm often supersedes other evaluative measures prized by our cultural notions of love—ideas like “soul mates” and “true love”—because height serves as the starting place for compatibility.

The idea of shorter-man-taller-woman relationships affect an embodied emotional response of discomfort from non-normally statured persons and normally-statured individuals alike. Such a relationship, Rachel, 6’, explained, “makes me uncomfortable because I’m not a tiny girl.” Although Rachel said she “finds that shorter men want give it a shot, want to approach me and talk to me” because “there may be a challenge or something,” she does not “usually take enough time to see if they have the ‘little man syndrome’ or if it’s genuine because it makes me uncomfortable. It is definitely something that is shaped me as an adult, not being available for anyone under a certain height. I’m sure I really missed out on some decent guys.” Rachel’s discomfort breaking the taller-man norm eliminates partners before any other criterion. “I don’t really care what people think,” she continued. “I just think I would be uncomfortable with it. It’s definitely there subconsciously. I size guys up.” For Rachel, the interactional policing of height norms less effectively regulates her partner selection than the internalization of those norms through the embodied sense of how heterosexual relationships should physically “feel.” Her personal emotional sense of embodied discomfort—rather than the pushback from disapproving or intrigued strangers—precludes her from entertaining the possibility of dating shorter men and she thus rejects them immediately. Yet the feeling of personal discomfort and the reactions of

others serves the same purpose in maintaining staturized sexual boundaries around “normal” height and the taller-man norm. Ashley, 5’11”, affirmed that this discomfort shaped her dating choices. She stated, “I think I’ve only dated a few guys that were shorter than me because it’s just weird to have a guy who is smaller than you. And then I feel like you’re always cognizant of height because you’re seeing it with your partner every time you’re with them. [Relationships with] smaller men are just always awkward. I feel like I can pick them up and hold them, and I just don’t like that.” In addition to the sense of weirdness surrounding relationships with a taller woman and shorter man, the desexualization of these relationships (as Ashely described as a feeling that she could pick them up, like children or puppies) creates an understanding of these relationships as platonic. Gupta (2015, 141) argues, “The desexualization of particular groups can be used as a method of social control.” For example, disabled persons have encountered the imposed label of “asexuality” because their bodies did not align with conceptions of normality and, therefore, sexuality regardless of the individual’s sexual identity (Kim 2011, 481). Austin, 5’5”, outlined the “unspoken” agreement of nonsexual friendship in the relationships between him and a taller woman: “One of my friends from high school, we would always hang out and talk and everything but it was kind of known that we’re just friends. It’s like ‘you’re not my type because you’re taller than me and I just can’t do it.’ It’s the same for her. It’s a recognition. It’s like an unspoken thing where usually when you talk to taller women it’s just obvious.” Because height organizes sexuality, the taller-man norm leads to the desexualization of these relationships and the elimination of potential partners. Yet, as Austin suggested in his explanation of the unspoken rule that his relationships with taller women remain platonic, the nonsexual assumptions in relationships between taller women and shorter men may have potential for gender flexibility by opening space for egalitarian friendship. Regardless, the exclusion of

certain heights from the dating pool by desexualizing taller or shorter individuals enforces the taller-man norm as a “personal preference.”

The meanings of male shortness often cast short men as platonic friends. Amy, 5', described “this one guy who is so cool and so awesome in every way and he was really hot and really buff and really nice. All girls loved him, but it was always like ‘I wish I could find a guy like you, but you’re like my brother.’” Dennis, 5’5”, recalled that his dates with taller women shocked fellow soldiers in the Army. He said, “Some of my buddies would say, ‘How did a little dude get that woman? She’s five inches taller than you are.’ That kind of stuff. My reaction was, ‘It’s because I’m a stud, baby.’ And they’d laugh.” Although Dennis chuckled at his joking response, his Army buddies’ disbelief mirrors the doxic assumption that women reject shorter men. The taller-male norm precludes many women and men from considering nonconforming partners, partly because doing so injects staturization into their relationships. Like Lindsey, 6’7”, who worried that revealing her desires was “mean to say,” Jill, 6’2”, said, “Personally I don’t make it known that I would like to date taller men because I feel like that would be shallow of me to say, but I feel like I want to date a peer.” She explained that although she knows her preferences reflect “outward influences where the woman is supposed to be the smaller one in the relationship,” she nonetheless felt dissatisfied in her relationship with her boyfriend, who is four inches shorter. Jill stated, “While I care for him very much, part of me wants to date more men who are taller. I would like to seem more normal and be in a traditional relationship with a man that is taller than the woman or at least have that experience more than once.” Significantly, Jill uses the word “traditional” to describe a relationship with a taller man—suggesting that as much as sexual orientation or gender roles, height factors into our conception of conventional heterosexual relationships. As an adolescent, Veronica, 5’10”, “tried to force myself to not have

a crush on Danny and to have a crush on Steve because he was the only kid in my class that was taller than me. I was like, this is the guy I'm supposed to have a crush on because this is the guy I don't look ridiculous skating around a roller skating rink with." The imagery of heteronormative romance—which, for adolescent Veronica, included couple skating—relies on imagery of smaller women and taller men to the extent that persons who would create nonconforming partners become unthinkable as mates.

The taller-man norm creates such discomfort for many—if not most—tall women and short men that they experience aversion to the idea of defying the height norms of staturized sexuality. Short men and tall women have such a constant awareness of staturized sexuality and the likely interactional consequences of breaking height norms, both in their romantic relationships and in others' perception of that match, thus themselves enforcing the taller man norm by avoiding height-deviant relationships. Sean, 5'5", described the totality of social responses comprising the context of nonconforming relationships:

"I can see why some tall women would be uncomfortable, especially if you're taller than most people around you that can severely limit your dating and how you're perceived. Because 'oh you're tall' even if you would be open to dating shorter guys. It's not taboo, but for example if me and you pose as a couple and I introduce you to all my friends and they check a box for if that was weird or not, and then if we had a big guy and a small woman pose as a couple everyone would say 'oh that's a cute couple,' whereas for me and you it would be 'oh man did you see how short that fucking guy was?' Or 'oh man she's really tall, what the hell is going on there?' Or 'oh I bet that would be awkward in the bedroom!' You wouldn't receive that feedback from a tall guy and a short woman. I don't even know what that means or what that says about everything, but I just know that that's a discrepancy. If I see a guy who was obviously involved with a woman who's taller than him, I'm like 'fucking you go man' because you have to have a lot of balls to decide to put yourself in that situation. Meeting the family is going to suck so bad. It's going to suck."

As Sean explained, the potential interactional repercussions and cultural sanctions of breaking the taller-man norm prevents many short men and tall women from dating one another. Rachel 6', agreed, "When I see a really tall girl with a short guy I'm always like, 'she is so brave'

because I just don't think I could do it." The awkwardness perceived by shorter men and taller women from the idea of sexual relationships with one another limits dating choices and reinforces the taller-male norm (even if many heterosexual couples include a taller woman).

Within the cultural context created by our ideas about how height reflects a desirable relationship and who can be potential mates, height is an organizing principle of sexuality and coupling. The preference for men's tallness and women's relative smallness—by both heterosexual women and men alike—as representative of how essentialized gender difference determines most romantic pairings and influences the relationships of non-conforming couples. Thus, the taller-man norm constrains and shapes sexuality—and the relationships and families that come from sexual partners—as much as other structural factors such as class and race.

“TALL, DARK, AND HANDSOME”: THE EMBODIMENT OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

A crucial tenet of the taller-man norm is the desirability of bodies that facilitate conformance: tall men and short women. Tall men expressed a default status of both masculinity and attractiveness. Noah, 6'8", assumed that he has “definitely gotten the benefit of the doubt on good looks because I'm tall” after numerous women expressed that they “are attracted to me purely because I'm tall.” He said, “The first words out of their mouth are only ‘God, you're tall.’” The different dating implication of height for tall men and women presents different rules for them to select mates. Tall men can select from a large range of women and still form height-conforming pairs. Paul, 6'9", said he dated short and tall girls because “for me personally it never was a big deal. I never had a type of girl that I was looking for.” Yet his 5'10" wife “joked that she saw me spotted me on campus because I was tall,” signaling a suitable match according to the taller-man norm. Most participants reported that women often state in their online dating profiles that they will not consider shorter men. As Charles, 6'3", explained, he “would always

say, ‘Well, I’m 6’3” so I can date girls 6’2” and shorter”’ according with the rules of staturized sexuality. According to these rules, taller women may seek taller men as partners in order to fulfill the taller-man norm. Yet while the tall-man norm would suggest that the taller the man, the larger the potential dating pool, some of the tallest men found that normally-statured women may “want somebody who is a little closer in height,” according to Shane, 6’10”. He said, “On dating websites, a lot of women will say they don’t want to date a man shorter than them. So that’s kind of nice to not have that to worry about, but 6’10” can be a little too tall.” In this scenario, the taller-man norm butts against conceptions of normal bodies. Like Robin, the gay woman who used height standards for choosing same-sex dates, Shane’s designation of strangeness results from the permeation of the meaning of height in sexuality. For Robin, height shaped dating choices despite that her sexual orientation did not invoke the taller-man norm. For Shane, the factor of “normal height” overshadowed his dating advantage as a tall man.

The bodies of tall men present the appropriate male bigness of hegemonic masculinity, and, therefore they do not have to assert their masculinity with the same pressure as smaller men. The correlation between masculinity and tallness provides tall men a default acceptance of their manliness. At 6’9”, Paul’s tallness inoculates him from power struggles experienced by women or shorter men. He said, “I hear a lot from women teachers that students are much more aggressive toward them, especially with grades. There’s very few times that I have students complain about a grade and when they do they’re very polite about it. I think it’s a much more indirect thing that I know that I’m intimidating in the professional setting especially.” Tall men’s gender privilege comes as much from the waiver of proving their masculinity as from the benefits accorded to them because of their size. Tall men receive a consistent advantage from their height that neither short men nor tall women can access. Although height impacts the lives

of tall women and men in similar ways, the gender symbolism of men's tall bodies parallels the requirements of hegemonic masculinity; thus, tall men can rely on the bodily capital from their height despite the occasional perception that they are unusual. Charles, 6'3", explained, "If a guy's tall, well, he's manly. If a girl is tall a lot of times it's that she's freakish. I think that's unfair. I think that's wrong. My aunt is over 6' and she had trouble finding the right guy. She played volleyball at the University of Nebraska. She used that height for good, but she always stood out." The gender advantage, then, for tall men dialectically relates to the gender disadvantage for tall women (although tall women experience some benefits from their tallness by accessing more masculine forms of power). Noah, 6'8", said, "I think there's some sort of negative connotation with a certain height on a woman. If a woman was taller than a man, he's intimidated, which I've never understood. But I guess I understand it because women are generally attracted to men who are taller. It's the same thing. There's even less accommodations for tall women I would say." Additionally, while tall and short men have shared *gender* expectations, the connotations of tallness and shortness regarding masculinity render much different embodied experiences of manhood. Austin, 5'5", argued, "Usually with someone who's 6'3", 6'4" they're going to say 'and then this huge guy came out of nowhere.' But if a short guy came in, they're not going to say 'he was really buff.' It's never the other way." The intersections of height and gender that create different meanings of both for tall and short women and tall and short men result in the staturization of gender.

"SHORT AND SWEET" WOMEN: THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF WOMEN'S SHORTNESS

Despite different gender and height memberships, both short women and tall men's heights grant them a gender-credibility boost. With bodies that represent masculinity or femininity via the appropriate heights, others identify tall men and short women as meeting a

threshold for essentialist conceptions of manliness or womanliness, respectively. Short women's association with femininity can manifest in others' perceptions of them as well as their perceptions of themselves. Women's shortness symbolizes the demure and submissive aspects of traditional femininity, establishing short women's womanliness even if they are neither demure nor submissive individuals. Chelsea, 5', explained, "Asian culture is a male-dominated culture, and I'm sure if there was a tall woman—and there's not in my family—she would definitely not be seen as attractive. It'd seem very different. Women are supposed to be smaller and submissive, especially in that Asian culture. I feel feminine as a small person because of how I was raised." Although Chelsea spoke specifically of her Asian-American family, she describes a correlation of shortness and traditional femininity present throughout the U.S. Margaret, 5', described her "social gain" because shortness "does make you look a little bit daintier, which I personally don't care about, but I think it helps on the femininity checklist. I guess the checklist is really subjective." This "checklist" garners short women a femininity boost, a process that Alicia, 5', likened to tall men's additional appearance of masculinity. The attractiveness of women's shortness, Alicia explained, "reinforces female stereotypes because it's sort of consistent with them, like a woman is supposed to be shorter than a man. So I'm just that much shorter." Her shortness "is never like a problem. It's just sort of supposed to make it easier to be a woman because I don't have the problems of being tall, which I feel like does get treated like a problem. There's never magazine article being like, 'Oh well you're short, here's how you can make up for it.' Everyone says, 'Oh that's great, you can wear really high heels.' Which I don't wear anyway." These typically feminine cultural symbols—high heels, fashion magazines—endorse the attractiveness of shortness.

In situations where short women's correlation with traditional femininity suits them, short women may capitalize on others' perceptions of their helplessness by deploying markers of traditional femininity to achieve their goals. Margaret, 5', attributed this femininity advantage, to "being smaller, and I don't want to use the word sweeter because that seems weird, but you're more approachable. I have a softer voice a lot of times, so people think that I'm really sweet." Because traditional femininity dictates that women be accommodating and likeable if not obedient, the sweetness symbolized by a shorter female body accentuates the femininity of short women. Connotations of sweetness and childlike provide short women with some maneuverability in social situations should they employ a staturized gender practice of emphasizing their appearance of helplessness. For short women in certain contexts, their most effective tool inspires the protective responses so others will facilitate their attainment of their goal. Melissa, 4'10", compounds the embodied gender capital from her shortness with other practices of femininity, particularly a "sweet" voice and language of helplessness:

"I don't if this is because of my height or if I'm like this because of my height growing up or if it's just because I'm female, anytime I ask for help I always get a big smile on my face. I'm like, 'I'm sorry to bother you but can I please ask for a favor? Can I get you to reach this?' Or something like that. Even if it's not from reaching something, I do the same thing. 'I'm sorry to bother you, but can I ask a favor?' I don't know if that's from my height or just how I am, but I think how I am is a lot to do with my height so probably does kind of all relate. I think they see me a little more feminine because of my height. They see me as weaker because of my height. I've always been one that's like, use it to your advantage. If they want to see you as weaker, then sometimes it's nice. You can be like, 'Okay will you do that for me then?' And then sometimes you're like, 'No, I can do it, I'm fine,' depending on the situation."

Melissa conceives of this sweetness as something she can choose to emphasize when femininity can facilitate her attaining a goal, and in other situations she can deemphasize her shortness in order to access independence. However, Amy, 5', experienced her staturized gender as salient despite her intentions when a friend asserted that she could tease people and they would not take

offense. Amy recounted that her friend said, “‘You know it’s not fair you get to get away with so much because you’re small and cute so you can do all this stuff, you can totally be a jerk or whatever.’ We were hanging out with a friend and I was just mocking him in a friendly way, but that’s just the way that I interact I never considered that people let me get away with stuff. Part of it was being a woman, part of it is being little.” Amy’s friend perceived Amy as exploiting the femininity benefit of her shortness. Although Amy may have been ignorant of the significance of her height in this interaction, her friend identified the influence of staturized gender that may not be as self-determined as short women wish.

The calculus of staturized gender and sexuality is mostly straightforward for men—tallness is mostly good and shortness is mostly not good—but tall and short women experience layers of meanings intersecting with their height, gender, and sexuality resulting in contextual gender and bodily privilege and power. Although height undoubtedly influences short and tall men’s sexuality in relation to hegemonic masculinity, short and tall women craft gendered and sexual selves within the versions of female sexuality invoked by staturized sexuality. According to the contours of staturized sexuality, tall women represent sophisticated sexuality and exoticized beauty, but are often relegated to a fetishized fantasy that men do not actively pursue. Short women, however, cannot access this idealized beauty but their smaller bodies accommodate heterosexual romance—at the consequence of seeming “cute” or “hot” rather than beautiful or sexy. Chelsea, 5’, described how height influences constructions of attractiveness, which, she argues, “is not universal. I think in our society, tall women are seen to be attractive and small women not so much, depending. The long legs and the physique, that’s something I’m never going to have, ever. I remember thinking that growing up.” Although short women represent mainstream female sexuality—with the benefits of more potential partners and the

limits of traditional femininity—they do so against the ideal of statuesque “supermodel” beauty. Amy, 5’, explained that although some men enjoy her smallness, others idealize tall women. She said, “A lot of guys bring it up that they like that they can carry you. But a lot of guys are definitely into tall girls. Guys will talk about that. I feel a little bit awkward sometimes when the guy is like ‘a girl really needs to have super long legs.’ It’s one of those things they just say.” In practice, men may appreciate her size, but Amy and many short women feel that the construction of ideal beauty excludes them from a sophisticated and mature image of beauty. Katherine, 5’1”, recalled, “My ex-boyfriend’s mom was like, ‘You’re just so cute and little.’ We dated for four years and she never got over it: ‘You’re just so cute and little.’ And I was like, ‘Thanks. That’s exactly what I want to be.’” Katherine’s sarcasm laments the constraints of staturized sexuality confining short women to cuteness.

Although the bodies of short women obtain positive gender and bodily capital because of their cohesion with imagery of femininity, the tradeoff for their gender credibility is the diminished power and status of women in a patriarchal society. Many short women enact mitigating gender practices to minimize the salience of their hyperfemininity; although their shortness may prove beneficial in many situations, their appearance can be disadvantageous in misogynist contexts. Unlike tall men who minimized their masculinity asset to avoid appearing overly impressive or intimidating (and perhaps occasionally weird), short women who minimize their femininity do so because being a woman—particularly a hyperfeminine woman—is not always an asset in a patriarchal society. Alicia, 5’, stated, “Cute applies to kittens and children—not serious things that you respect. It’s a compliment, but it’s almost an underhanded one because of puppies and children, not things that you actually admire or respect. Cute doesn’t really fit in with that. I don’t wear heels, but I think if they were not so uncomfortable I probably

would just to try to combat the cute.” The smallness of women’s bodies lends a childlike appearance. The descriptor “cute” for short women signifies how their bodies can equate them with the most disempowering aspects of traditional femininity. Katherine, 5’1”, described, “I feel like I am universally mothered, which is really funny because I’m so nurturing and mothering anyway. But so many strangers feel the need to take care of me, help me do something. I’m sure some of that is I’m a woman, but I think a lot of it is being small.” There certainly lies some reward in others’ willingness to help; but for very small women the duality of cuteness is the perception of immaturity. For Melissa, 4’10”, who wears a 4.5 shoe size, and buying pairs that fit means “they have sparkles and cartoon characters on the shoes and they light up.” In order to obtain the appearance of an adult woman, Melissa purchases shoes a size and a half too big. She said, “The smallest size most places carry are sixes so I end up buying sixes a lot of the time in dealing with it being too big. It does actually get very, very uncomfortable. My boots, I wear two socks to fit them most of the time because my foot is just too small for them.” Hannah, 4’10”, dislikes others’ presumptions about her femininity and purchased a lifted truck to convey rougher persona. She stated, “When somebody points out to me, ‘You’re being really forward,’ I’m like, ‘Well, I have to make up for my stature.’ I think a lot of people assume because I’m petite and small that I’m going to be kind of demure and soft-spoken and I don’t want to be lumped into that kind of expectation just because of my stature.” Melanie, 4’10”, explained that because she feels comfortable in a feminine appearance, the correlation of small bodies with youth affects her daily life and identity. She said, “It definitely shapes who I am and how I react to things, just my experience of the world. For example, professionally I’m a clinician so I work with a lot of people and sometimes I feel like people might not take me as seriously because I’m short.” Melanie utilizes “ways that I try to compensate for my height in work,” such as wearing

heels. She explained, “Sometimes I’ll foresee a situation and be like, ‘oh, maybe I should wear my heels today,’ that thought process. If I’m meeting someone for a first time and I want them to take me more seriously, I’ll wear heels because I can look taller.” As a self-described very feminine woman, Melanie’s gender identity aligns with the cultural meaning of her height, yet as a short woman she downplays her shortness in situations where a petite presence disadvantages her. Although those expectations of short women as hyperfeminine provides advantages in terms of proving gender conformity, the staturized gender imagery of a short woman’s body can represent powerlessness within a patriarchal society.

NAPOLEON AND THE FIFTY-FOOT WOMAN: DEGENDERING SHORT MEN AND TALL WOMEN

In contrast with the bodily capital accorded to tall men and short women, the bodies of tall women and short men garner negative gender and bodily capital. Whereas the correlations between height and gender grant short women and tall men an advantage in their gender performance because their bodies already (hyper)conform, the staturization of gender excludes tall women and short men from typically gendered experiences and practices because of their distance from the normal range for women and men. Tall women often feel excluded from the category of femininity, particularly in situations that value conventional womanhood and sanction nonconformity, and they use creative staturized gender practices to counterbalance this negative bodily capital. For many women, clothes shopping represents a leisure activity, but tall women cannot participate in this gendered experience because few if any stores stock their sizes. When Leah, 6’3”, joined normally-statured friends for a shopping trip, “I had to fake it. Like, ‘Oh, I’m going to look for clothes,’ but really nothing in the store was going to fit me.” Similarly, Veronica, 5’10”, described how her tallness prevents her from engaging in shopping for vintage dresses because “I don’t get to pick the thing I most want to be wearing. I have to

pick the thing that most covers my butt. That's frustrating. I had to buy a dress that, while it was nice was not very flattering on me, just because it was long enough." Veronica's tallness stunts her enjoyment of shopping for vintage dresses, a hobby in which normally-statured women could easily participate. Because shopping is a particularly meaningful gender marker for women, the exclusion of tall women from this activity reflects how the staturization of gender constructs femininity for tall women as well as short and normally-statured women who can participate in these gendered activities.

Short men, too, incur negative bodily capital from the misalignment of their stature with hegemonic masculinity. Short men's height becomes an "emasculating" force not as the impact of shortness itself but due to its social and interactional effects. Austin, 5'5", said, "I am average height for a woman so sometimes when you're walking in a crowd of women you feel a little demasculinized. It just a sense. That's more me, that's how I feel when I'm walking with women." Tall men, Austin explained, are "more distinguishable. I wish I was more distinguishable." The appearance work of short men includes the relationship to formal men's clothing and the presumed largeness of the male body. Many short men perceive men's suits as designed for taller bodies as part of an aesthetic for men. Sean, 5'5", stated, "Coats that are long I don't typically like to wear. That might be just because I wasn't introduced to them until I was 22 or it might be that it does overly emphasize height, which does say something. For some taller people I guess, emphasizing height is a good thing whereas emphasizing shortness is a less desired thing." Long coats, typically worn by men over suits, represent the tall ideal within men's formal and professional clothing. Sean articulated that tall bodies embody "power to make an impression or impress people." Sean recalled, "I had a business professor who was once an executive at Wells Fargo, and he was 5'3", just a really short guy. But he was literally the most charismatic and

confident individual whom I have ever met so you can only imagine how much willpower he had to muster to develop the presence that he had.” Rather than deferring to cultural assumptions of tall men’s presence, other personal attributes of Sean’s professor provided “presence”—a designation saved for men, particularly tall men, and therefore a form of gendered bodily capital. Another strategy for balancing the negative capital of shortness for men is through avoiding an overall appearance of smallness. Austin, 5’5”, explained how his muscularity associates with his identity:

“I’ve always been known as the short stocky guy. I take pride in being strong. I think there sometimes a little bit of a pressure to keep that because I don’t want to get too skinny or thin. That’s been my identity my whole life. I want to keep that. I like to be viewed a strong because I don’t want to be the little guy. I’m just used to people recognizing me as athletic. I can’t really pinpoint it, I just like being viewed as that.”

Short men’s work to balance their negative bodily capital—through avoiding clothing designed to emphasize men’s tallness, maintaining larger muscular bodies, and coping with indicators of “masculine presence” besides a tall body—may be dismissed through the commonplace descriptor of “compensation.” But this rhetoric of compensation indicates how the thorough naturalization of staturized gender assumes an innate masculinity for tall men due to only height and ignores the functioning of gender and bodily capital for tall and short women and men.

Tall women and short men misalign with cultural correlations between femininity and smallness and masculinity and largeness, respectively, and they navigate sexual relationships with the awareness that their height—a very public and obvious aspect of their bodies and appearances—may turn off potential partners. Heterosexual short men encounter gendered expectations of size as both degendering and desexualizing through their characterization as less masculine. Sean, 5’5”, argued, “A woman saying ‘I’m short’ is very different from a man being short as far as the cultural expectation. A short guy and a short woman—just if we’re basing

everything off of that characteristic—I think a short woman is more sexually desirable than a short man would be.” The associations between height and desirability according to the dictates of the taller-man norm naturalizes hegemonic masculinity. Brian, 5’4”, described subsequent “animosity” that “most short guys probably have faced in the dating world” from taller women’s kneejerk rejections of short men. He relayed a story of Coretta Scott King meeting Martin Luther King, Jr., for the first time: “He’s this big prominent minister and activist and then he shows up and she’s like, ‘Who’s this little boy?’ That’s a very real issue for most short males.” As a short man involved in a heightism-awareness advocacy organization, Brian could articulate the flawed logic that casts short men as “little boys” within a cultural schema of “primal” sexuality in a contemporary world:

“People definitely perceive me to be less masculine. Women use it all the time: ‘A short guy can’t protect me.’ From what? Bears? There’s no proof that equates toughness with specifically height. They’re like, ‘A short guy can’t protect me from a rapist.’ How many rapists are out there raping people in front of their significant others? That doesn’t happen. And how many rapists are running around in broad daylight targeting specifically couples of mixed heights? It’s asinine, it’s ludicrous.”

Brian points to the absurdity of these cultural justifications for the taller-man norm in order to reveal the failure of individualist explanations of “personal preference” for conforming to the taller-man norm. As one of the most salient organizing principles for sexuality, marriage, and families, height determines a great number of sexual relationships because staturization infiltrates and naturalizes gender and sexuality.

If most tall men encounter feedback regarding their hypermasculinity, most tall women experience awkwardness from the very public incongruence of their large bodies with ideas about traditional femininity. Even if most smaller women do not meet all of the expectations of femininity—rarely do all women display nurturing behavior, demureness, emotionality, or any of the other symbols of femininity at all times in their daily lives—their height alone does not signal

a failure to meet these extreme standards of womanhood that, even if unrealistic, shape our ideas about who women should be. When Lori, 5'11", attended a formal event, the customary clothing for women emphasized how her body misaligns with expectations for women's bodies. She said, "When my husband and I went to a benefit dinner for a program I worked, it was a black tie affair. And I had a nice dress. I don't think I looked very good, but I just felt very uncomfortable, very awkward. I was wearing high heels then, too, and I didn't like it." Tall women's experiences with bodily capital extend from the mundane to the painful. Leah, 6'3", explained that adolescence was difficult because she did not "fit the cookie-cutter expectations when I'm not 5'5" and can't go shop at the mall—that's what's expected, at least that's what was normal when I grew up." She described the overt exclusion by her preteen peers, who wrote her a note on the final day of seventh grade saying, "'You're not normal and we don't want to be friends with you. We don't want to be friends with you, here are the reasons.' One of them was because I don't fit into the normal teenage girl height and weight categories." The words of Leah's classmates who did not want to befriend a tall, and therefore unusual, girl reflect cultural negativity toward women's bigness. The disjuncture between tall women and femininity rests on the correlation of smallness with femininity, especially with the idealization of thin women. Thus the source of much of tall women's deficit of embodied gender capital lies in our cultural animosity toward large women, leading many tall women to symbolically separate themselves with fat women. Rachel, 6', described how language conflates women's tallness with bigness: "I don't like 'giant.' I frequently will say 'Amazon' or 'freakishly tall' just because I think that's funny. Something about 'giant' always strikes me as not just about height for me. In my mind a giant is like an ogre or something so I don't love 'giant.'" Most tall women emphasize the distinction between tallness and a weight-based bigness (or even the designation of "big-boned"). Paige,

6'3, explained, "When I hear 'big,' immediately the offense comes and I have to digest that it. I'm like, 'Okay, they meant tall. It's okay, Paige, they're not calling you big. They're not calling you fat. They're just calling you tall.'" Paige's self-talk and Rachel's language preference indicates how many tall women strategize extrapolating height from imagery of bigness because of the influence of anti-fat culture on the construction of femininity.

Many tall women utilize fashion and appearance work to present a version of femininity ascribed to tall women. Often, high-heeled shoes represent tall women's gender dilemma as this particular marker of femininity and attractiveness backfires on tall women by increasing their nonconformity to traditional standards of female beauty. Some tall women choose to wear heels as an act of reclaiming their height, but most avoid them. Lindsey, 6'7", explained that although most women wear heels as part of their outfits when attending nightclubs, she wears flat shoes because "I don't like to draw any more attention to myself than what's already there." These formal contexts induce ambivalence as tall women consider their shoe choice. Ashley, 5'11", recounted that at her wedding, "I was very aware of the height of my shoes. I had the smallest heels that you could possibly have because they didn't want to look bigger than my husband and towering overhead in pictures." Ashley worried that the extra height from heels would make "people will look at me like 'oh my gosh she's super tall.'" Yet she admitted to regularly purchasing high-heeled shoes. She said, "It's funny because I'll buy heels. I want to wear heels. I have several pairs of heels. I have several pairs of wedges. I will buy them and I won't wear them." Jill, 6'2, often considers whether she makes choices about her appearance due to her height as "a response to wanting to be more womanly." When Jill's short hair increased her anxiety that others would perceive her as manly, she balanced her tallness with other aspects of her appearance by "playing up the way that I dressed. I wore more makeup and more jewelry so I

wouldn't appear to be a man from the back." The chance for others to mistake her for a man, Jill said, "terrified me." Despite having a "body that makes me look like a woman," Jill strove "to make sure that if I have short hair—which I kind of like having—I to play up the parts of me that are more feminine because I've taken such a traditional element of femininity, my hair, away." On the other hand, Veronica, 5'10", admitted that she perceives herself as an imposter in certain feminine gender markers. She said, "I look ridiculous with ruffles. I even would say I look kind of ridiculous in anything pink because pink is something I think looks really good in small amounts, and if you were something pink and you're tall and you're large, you're wearing a shit ton of pink." Within the available avenues to femininity—short women may have a default achievement of femininity due to the perception of cuteness or sweetness from their small bodies, but tall women may need to utilize height-specific routes to gender achievement such as the "sophisticated woman"—tall women employ gender practices of appearance and body work to demonstrate their femininity.

AMAZON WARRIORS: FETISHIZATION AND CONTEXTS OF POWER FOR TALL WOMEN

Tall women in particular negotiate typologies of staturized femininity by choosing different avenues to an appropriate gender performance; for tall women who wish to convey a culturally approved version of womanhood, they balance their height with staturized gender. Lindsey, 6'7", described the delineation between expectations of tall women to "wear clothes that show off our really, really, really long legs and to wear heels and to dress *that* part" as the sexy, sophisticated version of femininity and the "the other side of that coin" that "expects us to be more sporty and tougher, almost tomboyish because we are tall. People do expect you to play basketball or sports like that, which are a little more rough-and-tumble than gymnastics or swimming or other stereotypical girly sports." Andrea, 6', described her work as a graphic

design student as “more masculine” because she “never went to the feminine side of the design spectrum. I just don’t feel like I can pull it off. On the feminine to masculine scale I get just a couple notches toward feminine.” In her present daily life as a university student services administrator, Andrea’s sense of unattractive bigness or attractive tallness reflects her personal appearance choices. She explained, “If I am wearing a skirt, wearing makeup, wearing shoes that I feel are cute rather than clunky, I can promote feeling like the height is a benefit to presenting my femininity of being a sexy woman or something like that. Whereas on days that I feel bigger or interesting clunky or baggy, then I feel like it switches and promotes that masculinity.” Tall women select their appearance from the spectrum of staturized gender for tall women, ranging from masculine appearances most against imagery of traditional femininity—although expected for large bodies—to sophisticated, mature, and idealized beauty.

Tall women’s available typologies of femininity rely on ideas about feminine versus masculine tall women. Ashley, 5’11”, described “different categories of tall girls”: First, women like a “muscular” friend in high school who was “the same height, but she was just built bigger than me. She kept her hair cut short.” This teammate on the basketball team “was kind of poked fun at. Thankfully, she was a really good athlete so mostly people didn’t fuck with her in our school.” Alternatively, Ashley, was part of the other “category” of tall women, who “kept things pretty feminine. I kept my hair long. I wore bows in my hair. I wore makeup. I had more feminine clothing. I think it was just who I was. I don’t think it was deliberate.” While Ashley’s more muscular friend faced “people at other schools would ask who the boy on our team was” and “she obviously got the ‘she was a lesbian’” comment, Ashley “never got that” type of reaction because of her deployment of femininity markers and more conventionally feminine body type. Ashley explained that her high school teammate is “engaged and going to marry a

man. She's grown her hair under the pressure." In Ashley's description of this cultural process of categorization, tall women are either "normal" women who happen to be tall or they are masculinized women. Excluded from these designations of expectations for tall women is the cute or sweet presentation of femininity that people associate with short women.

The parallel construct of the exclusion of tall women from conventional romance is the fetishization of tall women's bodies. Tall women occupy an interesting cultural space of sexual symbolism as they balance between masculinized, and therefore degendered, and hypersexualized as an exotic fantasy. Ashley, 5'11", "found that short men like taller women" who believe "tall is sexy" or "tall is beautiful." Andrea, 6', recounted: "Every now and then, it doesn't happen very often, but I'll get sort of cat call tall comment that is specific to height. I usually just laugh it off or 'Whatever, little man.'" These men may be attracted to taller women's mature physique, like the high school boyfriend of Veronica, 5'10". Veronica stated, "I was tall, I had bigger hips, I looked like a woman when I was like 16 years old. That was really attractive to him. He was constantly complimenting the length of my arms, the length of my legs, my height, my long feet. He was very into how tall I was." Some men may aesthetically admire tall women's bodies, but many tall women acknowledged their role as a sexual fantasy or challenge to men. Paige, 6'3", contrasted "some guys who are so fascinated by the height and by my stature that that's what attracts them, and not even anything about me, like a fantasy" with "other guys that are so intimidated by the height that they don't even try. They just kind of stare from afar and maybe say 'oh you're beautiful,' but it doesn't go any further than that because they're so intimidated." Thus, these men may find tall women attractive in the abstract—as a fantasy or hypothetical—but the symbolism of tall women as oppositional to traditional femininity prevents them from approaching taller women (particularly if doing so breaks the taller-man norm). Of

the men who approach her, Paige said they “are so impressed that it’s like ‘I have to conquer her, I need to talk to the tall girl.’ Not because of anything about me, but it’s just tall girl. I’m kind of looked at not as a person but as a challenge.” The characterizations of tall women as fantasies, challenges, or commodities all point to the fetishization of tall women’s bodies. Jill, 6’2”, compared the aspect of imagery about tall women’s sexuality: “Height within a certain range can be seen as more beautiful, but then you have that other fetishized exotic look about you because you’re different. I feel neither of those are particularly healthy.” These options seem unhealthy to Jill because this logic reduces tall women as powerless recipients of culture while simultaneously imbuing them with power.

The fetishization of tall women’s bodies isolates tall women into the category of fantasy, whether approachable or untouchable. Often the trope of the Amazon, an iconic figure of a powerful and aggressive mythical woman-warrior with a confusingly potent sexuality, supports the hypersexualization of tall women. Jill, 6’2”, described “Amazon” as a “fetish word.” She explained, “The first time that I was called Amazon, I felt really uncomfortable as it was fetishizing my size and prioritizing height over me as a person.” Many tall women reject the term *Amazon* for its correlation with bigness and masculinity, but it is not a desexualized term. As potential disruptors of conventional femininity because their bodies convey a possibility for womanhood outside the parameters of traditional gender, tall women encounter the repackaging of their embodied subversion as an “Amazon” or “Wonder Woman” caricature. This fetishization reduces tall women’s threat to structural gender by categorizing tall women as a sexual conquest for men. Sean, 5’5”, described a height-related online interaction with a man, assumed by Sean to be extremely tall, who said, “‘If I ever meet a girl who’s taller than me, I’m either going to fight her or fuck her, I don’t know which.’” Sean remarked, “I think it’s funny as

hell.” The joke packaging the perceived power of tall women’s sexuality—resonant both with Sean and the online commenter—signals the cultural ambivalence and violent fantasies toward the exoticized “Amazon.” Beyond the range of normal beauty, even modelesque beauty for women under 6’, our conceptions of desire and female power fetishize the bodies of the tallest women.

Through the cultural masculinization of tall women’s bodies, tall women face the dilemma of presenting appropriate femininity—but they also have the potential to access some forms of masculine power. Although tall women participants described the most detailed and symbolically crucial process of balancing negative gender capital, tall women conveyed an appreciation of the flexibility and power they can access because of their larger bodies. They may lament the decreased image of femininity, but tall women enjoy the easier access to the realm of masculinity and its associations with power, leadership, and independence than women with smaller bodies. Andrea, 6’, stated, “I feel safer as a bigger person. I have been fortunate enough to not have any assault experiences. I may be wrong, but I feel like my height has protected me in some ways because of the power of my stature. I think I feel generally safer as a bigger woman than a lot of smaller women do.” Because the vulnerability of women’s bodies to assault supports the patriarchal paradigm, tall women’s size symbolically excused them from the normalized danger associated with being a woman. Thus, the power indicated socially by tallness permits many tall women to identify and reject constraints of traditional femininity. Jill, 6’2”, explained how her tallness led her to a more fluid idea of femininity:

“A lot of times I do find myself kind of shirking, especially as I’ve grown older, the idea that women are supposed to be delicate and feminine and that means being small and frail. Having been tall all my life, I have never really even bought into that idea. But sometimes, especially as I got into my mid-twenties, it just became more visible to me that women ‘should’ be small and frail and delicate. For me, that’s always just been something that’s completely antithetical about me. I’m a tall person. I take up a lot of space in the world.

Now I'm like, 'I'm a woman. This is who I am.' I'm not supposed to be any different than who I am, but I find it coming in more and more. And I'm just trying not to let it affect how I live my life because I feel like there's nothing I can do about besides cutting off my legs."

The permanence of Jill's incongruence with feminine expectations due to her larger female body—and the perception that her largeness is less changeable than bodies that misalign with thinness ideals due to weight—enabled her to dispute the naturalization of staturized gender. Many tall women dislike the term "Amazon" for its masculine imagery, but Veronica saw subversive potential in more powerful images of tall women's beauty. Veronica, 5'10", said, "You hear the term 'Amazon woman' and things like that, so there's something less ethereal and a little more primitive about a really tall beautiful woman. I think that there's definitely a societal standard for beautiful tall women, but I think it's a very different standard of beauty than our traditional beauty model." Although tall women experience negative gender and bodily capital in contexts valuing traditional femininity (the same contexts that award capital to short women), the "different" standard of beauty outside mainstream ideals and tall women's access to power otherwise denied to women generates a unique form of bodily capital in which tall women's height affords them benefits in some contexts and liberates them from the expectations of traditional femininity. Paige, 6'3", recounted her transformation into reframing her height and sexuality as empowering:

"Guys always remembered me, and I was like, 'Hey, I kind of like this.' From that point on, I became overconfident. I have this overconfidence that 'I'm different, I am unique. There's no one else like me.' I like to call myself a queen because tall women glide, like when you enter a room you make a grand entrance. So I like to refer to myself as 'Queen Paige.' And I carry that. I'm like, I'm tall and I might as well run with that, be elegant and poised with it. Okay, there are different types of tall girls: thin tall girls and then there are voluptuous tall girls. I'm in the middle so it takes a really confident guy to be with a woman like me. So that's the only time that I feel insecure about my height, but I shake it off immediately. I wear heels. Just because I'm tall I can't wear heels? No. If it comes in my shoe size, first of all, I'm blessed and you better believe I'm buying one in every color and I'm going to wear them. People have mistaken it as 'she wants to be seen or she's a show off or she wants to stand out,' but really it's 'I'm just like every other girl and I'm

embracing my fashion and I'm embracing what I like and I'm wearing what I like.' I kind of do feel like I'm on top of the world. It's very empowering."

Despite Paige's occasional dating struggles, she perceives that she was successful incorporating the positive aspects of staturized sexuality for tall women—in particular the connotation of regality—into her self-concept. Through access to masculine forms of power and subversive femininities, such as the reclaimed "Amazon," tall women can activate height-based privilege.

FREAKS AND OAFS: THE THREAT OF STRANGENESS FOR TALL AND SHORT MEN AND WOMEN

The staturization of gender for women and men, both tall and short, relates to the demarcation of what constitutes strangeness in arbitrary inch designations. Although these parameters of "normal" and "weird" affect short and tall men and women, these height designations vary according to "masculinity" and "femininity." Each category of height and gender accompanies a range of heights considered unremarkable. Sean, 5'5", said, "Honestly people think I'm taller than I am because 5'5" is so short. Usually 5'6" I'd say. I don't know if it's because with 5'6" you're getting close to the safe zone, you're almost not short. I think the world average is 5'8". I'd say at 5'7" is the safe zone, qualitatively speaking." Most participants mentioned average heights for men and women as a frame of reference for gendered relational meanings of height. The "safe zone" that Sean articulated represents the scope of height designating normalcy—or at least minimized effects of staturization for men's bodies. According to the dictates of hegemonic masculinity, in which large male bodies represent power, tallness should provide constant reward for men. Charles, 6'3", described himself as "not that tall. I'm almost in the range of normal, whatever that means." For men a few inches taller, strangeness can overwhelm the appearance of power. As Paul, a 6'9" political scientist, observed, "I think there are 'diminishing returns,' to talk as a social scientist, that goes up to about 6'7" and it starts going down. It becomes too strange outside the norm where being too tall is not as good." At

such heights, men become vulnerable to perceptions as “freaks.” Shane, 6’10”, stated, “I’ve heard people describe me as freakishly tall, and that to me is always felt a little more negative because freak has this negative connotation to it.” For tall women I interviewed, the symbolic measurement of weirdness rests on the 6’ marker. At that height, oddness replaces the association with to models for taller women who are under 6’. Andrea, 6’, described the variations of femininity up the height chart:

“I think there’s a point at which women being tall get good comments, get jealousy remarks. I do get that. I have people who say I wish I was your height or whatever. So then there’s the inevitable ‘yeah, but you can’t find pants, ha ha, we should find the same pair of pants and you can cut yours off and I can sew them on my pair.’ I feel like there’s a point at which women, it’s no longer seen as an advantage or desirable trait. You become the Viking. You’re outside the bounds of the height limit that women should be and so you become oafish and you get negative comments.”

The 6’ marker may represent some sort of attainment for men, but for women the same measurement violates gender norms. While Charles considered his height acceptable and even normal and advantageous as a 6’3” man, Paige encountered negative perceptions of the same height because she is a tall *woman*. The 6’ demarcation separates Paige from tall women closer to the range of “normal” for women. She said, “I still consider 5’10” tall, but also at the same time, I think that 5’10”-ers, they don’t get as much scrutiny as someone that 6’3”. I think that they blend in easier, and I think that they’re more accepted, especially in dating. They can buy fashion that fits them. They can get away with squeezing into stuff, versus a 6’3” girl.”

Extremely tall women and extremely tall men experience their heights perceived as stranger the farther their bodies go into tallness and shortness. For short women, however, the rewards of sexual desirability extend to the boundary of medicalized height conditions.

Yet as tall men represent embodied masculinity, they interact with the world via the perception of tall men’s hypermasculinity. These interactions occur within the context of

staturized masculinity as perceptions of tall men as hypermasculine butt against individual tall men in their daily lives. Thus, tall men may try to downplay the perception of masculinity.

Charles, 6'3", recounted how he learned from his father to counteract his potential appearance of aggressiveness:

"I remember my dad talking about how he had to consciously position himself so he wouldn't come across as intimidating to people. He would go out of his way to be the more 'gentle giant' rather than being verbally aggressive or socially assertive. Even though that wasn't his nature, he would be more standoffish cannot come across as so imposing with his height. I guess that something that I've also tried to adopt, especially in situations where there's a lot of angst or tension. I've had to pull back and calm things down. I get that from my dad's conversations with us that someday I might be taller than everyone else to and I need to be conscious of the fact that I'm taller than them and just that fact comes across as an imposing force to someone else. I maintain a level tone, level head."

Charles aims to alleviate some of the intimidation that attends tallness by presenting a reserved demeanor. Because of height's immutability, men's tallness conveys an innateness about their masculinity often translated through conceptions about physical confrontations. Noah, 6'8", explained, "Most people are intimidated by my height and then they speak to me and they're like, 'Oh, he's harmless.' A lot of guys will be like 'Oh, you're big. I'd love to have you in a fight.' That's been one thing that's always driven me insane because I'm not a fighter at all." He described how his tallness provoked shorter men to attack him in college. He was "punched four times" after "people would just run up and trying fight me and hit me just because they're trying to prove their masculinity or whatever it is they were trying to prove, that they could beat up a bigger guy I guess. Being tall invited confrontation more than I wanted." In addition to the association between tallness and masculinity, Noah's experience reveals how persons of non-normal stature represent a category of persons available for intrusion into their personal space, verbally or physically. Thus, tall men also live with the pressure of what their tallness "should" accord them in terms of masculinity. Shane, 6'10", described the embarrassment of not meeting

those expectations, especially as others assume he possesses athletic talent and that “I can jump, that I must’ve played football growing up. There’s a lot of masculinity that comes along with sports in athletics and competition.” Yet when Shane participates in recreational sport competitions, he encounters that other participants “can be a little disappointed because I’m not fulfilling the assumptions that they’ve made” about his athleticism based on his height. Shane explained, “To a certain extent for my part it can be a little emasculating sometimes when people make assumptions about your level of athletic ability and you can’t follow through on them. It can be a little tough to say, ‘I’m 6’10”, but I can’t dunk a basketball.’” Shane’s nervousness about joining his church’s basketball league demonstrates the ubiquity of assumptions about tall men’s hypermasculinity, especially pertaining to physicality in fights or athletics.

The threat of the label of “strangeness” shapes gender and sexuality for tall and very short women and men—even for non-normally statured individuals who gain gender capital for their embodied conformance to conventional masculinity or femininity. Short and tall men and women’s mate selection preference for partners conforming to the taller-man norm should suggest the most comfort within relationships pairing a very tall man with a very short woman, many of these couples report physical awkwardness. Often, their significant height difference inhibits conventional romantic and sexual interaction. The simplest of gestures we use to convey romantic affection, such as handholding, work best not only for couples of a taller man with a shorter woman but with normally-statured or similarly-sized persons. Even within the safety of taller-man-smaller-woman norms, some very short and very tall persons may choose to (or at least fantasize about) dating someone closer to their height. Katherine, 5’1”, described “really tall guys” as “just my type.” She explained that dating much taller men is “kind of hard. You’re like, ‘Oh sorry I can’t reach you right now.’” When Danielle, 4’11”, went out with her 6’1” ex-

husband, “people would look at us oddly.” She said dating a much taller man “looks odd to me. I do prefer to stay close to my height range. Realistically, I could never dance with my ex-husband being 6’1”. It didn’t work. It’s a huge factor in dating for me.” The physical maneuvering of significant height differences can complicate romantic and sexual relationships, even for women with a preference for much taller men. The awkwardness between extremely short women and extremely tall men as they perform dating and romance practices indicates that imagery of heterosexuality defaults not only to the taller-man norm but to an assumption of normally-statured individuals.

Certainly, taller men as well as shorter women have a more potential “height-appropriate” partners, but they nonetheless encounter staturized dating and coupling. Noah, 6’8”, asserted that height has “never been a determining factor for me and who I date. It’s always been the personality more than anything else.” Yet, he lamented, “I can never find any tall girls who are single. Dating someone who was shorter than you is difficult because of the shared awkwardness of hugs and kisses.” Thus tall heterosexual men, too, encounter awkwardness with a significantly shorter partner. Charles, 6’3”, explained that his 5’6” wife “stands on a stair to give me a hug when I leave in the morning.” Dating much shorter women, according to Charles, leads to an awkwardness in typical heterosexual romantic behaviors. He said, “Really short girls, you get down to like 5’3” and shorter, and it just hurts to look down at them. You can’t have a conversation without your neck starting to hurt.” Although the perceptions aligned with the taller-man norm hold couples of very tall men and very short women as the most desirable, the embodied experiences of these couples often centers on awkwardness. Shane, 6’10”, bemoaned the awkwardness of performing rituals and behaviors of heterosexual romance with a significantly shorter female partner:

“I’ve only really had one girlfriend ever and she was 5’8”. To an extent it would be nice to date somebody that was sort of closer to my height, but I’ve sort of resigned myself to the possibility that it’s probably not going to happen just from a sheer probability standpoint. There just aren’t that many women out there who are even taller than 6’. From a comfort level I probably wouldn’t date anybody shorter than 5’6”. When I went to senior prom I was 6’8” and the girl I took to senior prom was 5’4”. Dancing was awkward. You can see on the senior video the camera panning the dance floor and it looks like I’m dancing by myself because you can’t see my date. I don’t have much dating experience, but it is something that I think about.”

Although Shane and his dates conformed to the taller-man norm with over a foot between them, he found their physical interactions clumsy and uncomfortable. While pairs of very tall men and very short women should enjoy their relative size according to the taller-man norm, instead these couples’ discomfort from their significant height difference frustrates the promises of the taller-man norm. However, because this awkwardness shapes their individual relationships rather than dominant gender arrangements, this pattern lacks the cultural pervasiveness to constrain partnering choices with the symbolic weight of the taller-man norm.

Our talk about sexuality includes a preoccupation with height in sexual pairings as persons evaluate whether a couple is “strange” based on their relative statures. Couples of extremely short women and extremely tall men face social scrutiny from others’ anxiety over the reduction of taller men as available partners to tall women if those tall men instead pair with short women. Many tall women admitted some degree of resentment toward extremely short women who date or marry the tallest men, who could enable tall women to achieve conforming relationships. Paige, 6’3”, explained, “I think it’s annoying that you see a lot of tall guys with short girls. But that’s it. You see a lot of basketball players with short girls, and it’s like, ‘hello.’” After Lindsey, 6’7”, felt “irritated” that a 6’5” ex-boyfriend married a 5’3” woman, she asked tall male acquaintances why they tend to, in her opinion, date much shorter women. ““We just like the protector role,”” they told her. She continued, “And someone’s always like, ‘We don’t

really see tall girls, especially tall girls as tall as you, so we just kind of settle for what's around.' Obviously, if you like someone, it's not going to matter how tall they are or what their skin color is or hair color or whatever." Despite conceptions of love that profess the irrelevance of these physical traits, the force of height norms prevents many shorter-man-taller-woman couples from dating, leaving only the tallest men as suitable partners for tall women. Thus, when very tall men choose significantly shorter female partners, they expect disappointment about the subsequent reduction of mates for tall women. Accusations of short women "taking" tall men in the conflict over the smaller pool of taller-man norm-conforming mates for extremely tall heterosexual women—the tallest men—points to cultural dread about taller-woman-shorter-man couples and single women. Charles, 6'3", said, "There was some big 6'8" guy that we knew who married some 5'3" girl, and my grandma said something like, 'He should've married a taller girl because now what are those taller girls going to do? Who are they going to marry?'" There is a perceived scarcity of potential partners for taller women, who, presumably, will remain single rather than unthinkably couple with a shorter man. Shane, 6'10", recounted that his family disapproved of his shorter girlfriend because "my aunts didn't want me to waste my height on somebody who was 5'2" or whatever." Amy, 5', explained, "My friend who's an inch shorter than me—she's one of the people who is actually my height—her boyfriend was like 6'2" and she so when they walked around together tall girls would always be checking him out and giving her mean looks like 'he shouldn't be wasted on you.'" The idea of "wasting" a man's tallness on short women reflects the imperative that tall women pair with a tall or taller man—and that short women, with a larger pool of men who meet height norms, should keep to their own height grouping rather than "take" a taller woman's potential man.

CONCLUSION

Height represents the intersection of the naturalization of gender and sexuality. When we make comments as benign as “he is gorgeous and *so tall*,” we reflect how completely height informs sexuality. They are hot if vulnerable short women, exotic if unapproachable tall women, powerful if weird tall men, and friendly if emasculated short men. Using this taken-for-granted logic of attractiveness and coupling norms, we inscribe culture onto the gendered bodies of short, tall, and “normal” women and men beyond our evaluations of their desirability but through reinforcing the staturization of gender and sexuality in our most mundane comments. The taller-man norm naturalizes gender because sexuality and partner preferences seems such a personal choice, but the adherence to this cultural rule requires social maintenance and justification. Heteronormativity depends on the taller-man norm; therefore, heterosexuality determines the content of gender not only for tall and short men and women, who have a daily awareness of staturization of gender, but throughout society. Although the taller-man norm appears the result of personal preference and individual desirability, this very naturalization of staturized sexuality legitimizes gender essentialism. A sense of how couples should “feel” together physically, interactional policing, and heteronormative romantic imagery sustain the taller-man norm by legitimizing only conforming couples within heterosexuality. In fact, relationships between extremely tall men and extremely short women are rife with awkwardness despite their extreme conformance to the taller-man norm. As men and women select their partners according to the taller-man norm, they reinforce staturized sexuality, a cultural schema anointing the most conforming bodies with desirability.

As participants in culture, we naturalize gender through essentialist claims about who all men and all women “really” are. Yet the construction of the taller-man norm indicates that via sexuality, height naturalizes gender beyond our current criticism of “girls can’t do math” or

separate spheres essentialism. The naturalized taller-man norm manifests in mate preference, allocation of bodily capital, and the negotiation of gender privilege for tall and short women and men. However, these norms extend to normally-statured individuals who seek partners according to staturized sexual norms. The height-based designation of attractiveness parallels attainment of bodily capital, wherein tall men and short women's bodies represent idealized masculinity and femininity. Very tall and very short women and men not only negotiate their physical incongruence with the social world but select height-appropriate, often mitigating, staturized gendered practices. Within this menu of staturized gender practices, short and tall women deploy height-specific ways of being women. Short women may experience increased gender credibility—but in a society that values maleness and masculinity, tall women are the ones who can sometimes access the cultural power signified by tall bodies. Average-height men and women employ gender practices with the same knowledge of the rules of staturization even if they do not have to do so consciously every day. This means that height serves as a fundamental organizing principles of gender, sexuality, and families formed by individuals who couple according to the taller-man norm. Yet these practices and beliefs appear natural because they rely on the personal-choice rhetoric of the taller man norm as staturized gender and sexuality reifies the cultural logic of gender inequality. Therefore, to address gender inequality we must interrogate the ways that body size, particularly height due to its relative permanence, naturalizes gender, sexuality, and romance—including how we construct sexiness, attraction, desire, and vulnerability on the basis of the taller-man norm.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: HEIGHTISM AND EMBODIED INEQUALITY

I met Andrea and John at their favorite coffee shop—the one where they met, he proposed, and both return daily. A 5’5” man accompanying a 6’ woman is not a regular sighting, and we quickly identified each other. What struck me about this husband and wife was not their height difference—although the couple was certainly novel—but rather their complete comfort with their nonconformity and their candidness about a marriage that eschews the taller-man norm. This ease, I learned, had been cultivated throughout their transformative relationship. Six-foot-tall Andrea expressed feeling “lucky that I met John the way that I did because I’ve only ever dated one person who was shorter than I am before I met John,” whom she encountered while waiting for an online date. At 5’5”, John agreed, “When I was between marriages there were probably a lot of women that I would’ve been interested in that I just didn’t consider because they were taller. And they didn’t consider me because they were taller.” Yet when Andrea saw John reading a book at the same coffee shop while she waited for her real date, she initiated a conversation about their shared office to distract her. Andrea explained that her online “Match dates were all very physically restricted based on my stature” to taller men. The two continued meeting and “had great conversations that I wanted to keep having so I invited him to go have coffee back here with no ideas of any sort of dating intended or ulterior motive, just to continue the conversation.” From these meetings, Andrea said the two “accidentally fell into dating. I got to see him for who he was separate from the height search. If he had been on Match and I had been on Match, we never would’ve connected because of the expectation.” John said he had known Andrea for several years, but “only in the last two to two-and-a-half years did we really get interested in each other because we both reached the point in life where height didn’t matter anymore. We figured out who we were and we got along and actually fell in love.” Their

decision to reject the taller-man norm disrupted the process of staturization—and they represent one powerful way of dismantling heightism as a form of social inequality.

This chapter utilizes the marriage and experiences of Andrea and John to demonstrate the arguments made in this dissertation about the symbolic meanings of height. They both grappled with the limitations of staturization on their identities, and John and Andrea adhered to the taller-man norm (except for one shorter partner for Andrea). Others' reactions to their relationship — from surprised friends, to passing hecklers, to John's son calling Andrea a "hot Viking"— indicate the transgression made by Andrea and John's union. Height has a particular influence on several aspects of John and Andrea's marriage because both are non-normally statured, thus injecting staturization into their lives, amplified by their nonconformity to the taller-man norm. Their relationship demonstrates how staturization and heightism restrain the decisions and influence the identities of non-normally statured persons because height is a mechanism by which we sort people into meaningful categories. I conclude this dissertation with a call to confront heightism—including rejecting the taller-man norm.

ANDREA AND JOHN: DEFYING THE TALLER-MAN NORM

Both John and Andrea acknowledged the influence of height in their lives before they dated each other, but Andrea described a more intense process of learning to accept her bodily difference as a tall woman. Andrea thought she had fully accepted her tallness into her identity, yet her romance with John reignited those issues. She said, "I decided a while ago that I was going to be taller than a lot of folks anyway and I might as well wear what I want to wear. I went through a similar process with John again, only wearing flats and now I decided whatever. We're already far enough different in height that a couple inches isn't going to matter." John and Andrea both reconciled their height and identities after years of coping with staturized culture and interactions, but some of these issues resurfaced from their nonconformity with the taller-

man norm. Andrea, who learned that others' reactions to her height could be positive, explained, "Then with John entering the picture, it's been a recent recycling of that process because only first started dating, I was like, 'Oh my God, they're looking at us because we're against the social norm. They're talking about us. They're totally making fun of us, I know it.'" These situations evoked "some of those sensitivities that come up again in new environments in ways that I had worked through as an individual person," Andrea said. John maintained that "occasionally people still think it's weird, but even that wore off for the most part." He described a stranger calling out to them from a car: "I don't remember what they said. I do remember it happening and it upset Andrea more than me." Other times, John intuitively felt that "somebody will look at us while we were walking down the street and wonder what's that about because we were noticeably different in height, especially when she wears heels." Friends and family made more innocuous comments that nonetheless spotlighted their height difference. Andrea's father said, "'Thank God she's finally considering people who are shorter than she is.' Like, 'That's just ridiculous to not consider somebody shorter, good for her.'" Andrea relished the support of her father, but meeting John's teenage son was more complicated. She recalled, "When I met John's son and they were having a side conversation later, he said, 'Dad, she's huge! She's like a Viking!' Not my favorite reference. But then he said, 'And she's hot.' I was like, 'Alright, he's forgiven.'" John recounted another confusing comment from a "hilarious but crass friend who met her for the first time and saw us and said, 'Wow, she's wonderful, she makes you look rich!'" Staturized imagery and typologies of staturized gender shape others' reactions to their nonconforming relationship through symbolism about tallness and shortness. These reactions constitute staturized microaggressions—even from otherwise supportive friends whose

statements utilize the naturalization of the taller-man norm to marginalize Andrea and John. As interactional instances of heightism, staturized microaggressions characterize their daily lives.

Andrea and John acclimated to others' reactions to their marriage and also to the staturization of their relationship. Negative bodily capital, pressures of the taller-man norm, and interactional pushback to their nonconformity shape the staturized habitus for both of them as a tall woman and short man, but neither had previously considered the differences of daily life for tall and short persons. Andrea described how their height difference complicated moving in together:

"I hadn't recognized as such until I started living with John and he's pointing it out so much, like, 'Look at that, you can just reach up and get that and it takes me going to get a chair. It takes me three times as long to get that.' The converse of that is moving into his place, which he lives comfortably in with smaller rooms and tighter quarters, I definitely feel sort of oafish and like I'm taking up too much space. When I compare it with the house that I selected to buy, it's obvious that my wingspan fits better in my house than in his. Even if it's been subconscious, like I feel more comfortable in my space, it's definitely related to how much space I take up. I think because of John's height I noticed it a lot more whereas in the past I've always dated taller men and we shared the same space fine, it's just been an assumption."

Although many couples with different heights negotiate sharing a home with distinct preferences, this process was more poignant for Andrea and John because of the added symbolism of their nonconformity. From "living with Andrea and experiencing life from her perspective," John learned "how easily she seems to move about the world." He described an early date at Andrea's house when she "just sort of unfolded herself and she kept going and going, and it looks like almost one of those scissor lifts" to retrieve a bowl from what John considered an out-of-reach place atop the kitchen cabinet. He said, "She just plucked it off the top and I was amazed. I obviously know that there are people who can do that, but I have never lived with one. That was kind of cool. But it also made me realize that there's a difference. Not

bad, just different.” The physical realities of their bodies inspire different ways of everyday living that come to have meaning through the symbolism of height.

John and Andrea felt the pressure of the taller-man norm through the emphasis of height on their relationship, yet their shared perspective as non-normally statured persons provide commonality. John considers his height “more so in being with Andrea now because of that daily juxtaposition of my life and my life with someone taller.” Andrea stated, “I think our height plays a huge role in our particular relationship because we are both outliers.” As outliers, she explained, “We are both comfortable enough with our height that we can tease each other about our height difference. He’ll joke about me hiding stuff on the top shelf and I’ll tease him about ‘Let me get that for you.’ I think we both do that same thing of throwing it out there.” Yet not every height-based comedic moment of their relationship was intentionally humorous. Andrea described their wedding as “rife with height comments.” As they envisioned their wedding day, Andrea and John anticipated guests’ reactions and made preemptive comments and “joked about it all the time: we were going to bring a stool so he could step up on it to give me a kiss,” Andrea recalled. When the two exchanged vows, Andrea used the microphone “on this podium where its position was fine for me. Then it was time for him to do his vows. I turned it and lowered it and everybody laughed.” Whether a shorter bride would garner the same reaction when a groom lowered the microphone for her, Andrea and John assumed this scene was particularly funny because of their nonconformity to the taller-man norm despite that neither intended this gesture as a joke. Their nonconformity also yielded an interesting dynamic of compatibility to the couple. John is older, more professionally experienced, and more financially stable than Andrea, who has the cultural assumption of more power because of her tallness. She explained, “If I didn’t have the height, I’d be younger in age, younger in career. I would feel dependent on him

as a stronger party in the relationship, but I think my height offsets that because of the cultural expectations of height. And one way I think we work is because of that.”

The constraints of staturization and heightism require non-normally statured persons to rework the meanings of height in creative ways, and John and Andrea managed to form a satisfying relationship through adapting this imagery. Similar to the strain from expectations of women’s bodies earlier in Andrea’s life, beliefs about couples’ relative height distressed her as she dealt with the cultural meanings of the taller-man norm. She wished “that there wasn’t the social construct that the man had to be taller. I don’t really wish that neither of us were different heights.” The couple credited their compatibility to their mutual rejection of this social construct, or the taller-man norm. John said, “Maybe it’s letting go of feeling like I had to fit into the norm or that anybody had to fit into the norm. Maybe it’s a maturity thing or maybe it’s just fatigue. You get tired of thinking that way so you try something new and it works better.” Andrea suggested a more radical interpretation of their relationship: “I feel like we’re bucking the system.” Andrea’s sentiment reflects the cultural importance of the symbolic meanings of height that shaped their ways of thinking about themselves and their potential partners. To reject the taller-man norm, Andrea and John had to critically evaluate the lines of action and internalized dispositions shaped by the staturized imagery, interactions, and gender they encountered throughout their lives. This required their reflexive examination of the staturized habitus.

MAPPING STATURIZATION AND CHALLENGING HEIGHTISM

As the story of Andrea and John’s relationship demonstrates, the symbolic meanings of height justify and naturalize heightism by essentializing the construction of tallness and shortness. These symbolic meanings permeate many aspects of staturized culture: media, the built environment, gender, sexuality, and interactions. Staturized imagery in popular culture, media, and our collective consciousness naturalizes the symbolic dimension of heightism. The

staturization of American society includes the influence of height on others' perceptions of short and tall people and non-normally statured persons' perceptions of themselves, the predominance of the taller-man norm as an organizing principle of sexuality, and the ascription of bodily capital and styles of gender onto tall and short women and men's bodies. Heightism also includes blatantly discriminatory aspects of height-based inequality. While the very tall and the very short expect some degree of staturization in their interactions, the frequently insulting and belittling quality of staturized microaggressions marginalizes non-normally statured individuals in interpersonal situations and relationships. Afforded an outsider perspective on heightism, tall and short people can identify the ways that the physical size of their bodies influences their lives through the social and cultural meanings of height that are unrecognized by normally-statured persons. Without the acknowledgment of how height marginalizes individuals who are significantly taller or shorter than the normal range, tall and short persons have little validation or recourse for instances of heightism. In varying degrees of severity from nuisance to harmful, heightism affects short and tall persons' lives. For example, Melanie, 4'11", said, "I'm not saying being short is horrible or anything, but it definitely makes things a little more difficult." She self-analyzed why she jokes that she dates taller men in order to hopefully have normally-statured children because her children's "salaries would be higher. I'm trying to look out for them. I know that it's hard, that you can get made fun of for being short and there's other disadvantages, like it's harder to shop for clothes, it's harder to do things around the house, it's harder to fit in socially." Melanie wanted more normally-statured children in order to protect them from heightism. Melanie argued that parents want their children to have "the easiest life," especially "if I had a son, and everyone talks about guys who are short that they have a Napoleon complex. I wouldn't want someone to say that about my son if he was short." Melanie

recognized that if her children were normally-statured, they would be spared from the daily toll of heightism. From her outsider perspective on staturized culture, Melanie understands that height not only colors most of extremely tall and short people's interfacing with the social world but also how heightist beliefs and stereotypes can harm and marginalize non-normally statured persons.

Heightism does not originate from ethnic divisions, wealth disparities, anatomical differences, or any of the categories typically associated with mechanisms of inequality. Thus, denial of patterned and structured inequality is a commonplace response that tall and short individuals experiencing heightism encounter. They hear that they are too sensitive, lack a sense of humor, or are making something out of nothing. Furthermore, the overwhelming scope of heightism can seem insignificant to normally-statured persons *and* to extremely tall and short persons whose access to other forms of privilege and bodily capital minimizes or obscures the influence of heightism on their lives and identities. Many of my interviewees would explain in the same interview that their height was both insignificant *and* greatly meaningful in their identities and lives. In contrast with Melanie's view on heightism, Karen, 5', stated, "Fortunately our culture in the United States, it's such a melting pot anyway so it doesn't matter if you're short or tall or Black or white. Everybody kind of melts together so I've never felt like I was anything that was ever discriminated against." For many, ideologies of fairness and equality can be more important than the revelations from an individual's outsider perspective. Our individualist notions of abstract equality claim that physical characteristics such as height do not limit us. When we say a characteristic such as height does not matter, therefore, what we really mean is that it should not matter—even at the denial of clear social processes of inequality.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The goal of my dissertation research has been to show that height serves as an organizing principle not only in the daily lives, perspectives, and identities of non-normally statured persons but also in our culture as staturization shapes gender, sexuality, material objects, and the economy. My project contributes to sociological scholarship on gender and sexuality, stigma, culture, and the body by demonstrating the significance of staturization to each. I deepen arguments about biological determinism and gender inequality through explaining the role of height as a fundamental organizing principle in gender and sexuality that ultimately justifies gender essentialism and heterosexual boundaries. My research extends literature on stigma by showing how stigmatization accompanies boundary-work in interactions. For non-normally statured persons, the salience and meaning of height stigma depends on the relative sizes of the bodies in an interaction. Finally, this research contributes to cultural sociology and sociology of the body by identifying staturization as the permeation of symbolic meanings about height throughout social life and as a crucial influence on the staturized habitus. These insights broaden general research on height by challenging the assumptions that naturalize staturized social processes, such as the taller-man norm.

In future research, I will examine how adolescents' experiences with growing bodies reflects how they learn about the meanings of tallness and shortness for their identities. Many participants discussed growing too soon or too late and comparing their growth with their peers'—sometimes through official measurements at schools. Some participants blamed certain nutritional or exercise habits for affecting their growth and resulting in their non-normal stature. As classmates outgrew her, Chelsea, 5', recalled her relatives asking, “When is your growth spurt happening?” She lamented, “And of course it never came. All of a sudden you're still stuck at being your sixth grade height and everyone else is normal.” The mention of their

“growth spurt years” by several participants suggests that researching this adolescent experience can illuminate how staturization influences identity formation and adolescence, a common time for young women and men to learn cultural norms regarding sexuality and the body. Thus, researching the idea of the “normal growth spurt” with adolescents provides ground for examining an under-appreciated aspect of staturization.

I have also shown that staturization, like other systems of cultural symbolism, accompanies marginalization for non-normally statured persons. Through this research, I launched an analysis of the ways that staturized cultural symbolism maintains heightism. The advocacy organization Little People of America (LPA) identifies the casual usage of the medically-inaccurate and offensive term “midget” as one example of how staturized culture prohibits non-normally statured persons from equal treatment. LPA states: “The word ‘midget’ has been sometimes used to refer to people of short stature, but is now considered to be a slur by the majority of the members of our community. Many feel that the term dehumanizes and objectifies those with dwarfism” (Little People of America 2015). In my future research on staturized culture and heightism, I would like to analyze how media represent and instruct the categories of tall, short, and normally-statured in order to chart and de-naturalize the construction of staturized culture. I also would like to include the narratives of more romantic couples who break the taller-man norm, such as Andrea and John. Sexual boundaries legitimize heightism, foremost, by individualizing socially-conditioned prejudices and preconceptions regarding tall and short men and women. Therefore, I believe that the first step to challenging other forms of discrimination toward non-normally statured persons includes dismantling staturized patterns of desire. Romantic partners who defy the taller-man norm begin to disrupt the cultural logic of

heightism and intimately initiate the progress toward full expression of humanity for non-normally statured women and men.

This dissertation provides the foundation for a sociological interrogation of staturization and heightism. I maintain that understanding how cultural processes operate can provide leverage to challenge structural inequality. To minimize heightism's force of marginalization, we must work to neutralize staturized culture's limitations on the very tall and the very short. This work approximates the vision described by one research participant, Brian, a 5'4" anti-heightism activist:

"We don't see ourselves as short. We do see ourselves as who we are. We want to be viewed as individuals. We want you to get to know who we are and quit equating everything with our height. If you want to do something, let people know we exist and let people know heightism is real and the negative feedback loop we get trapped into is real. Things like that, basically getting people to view us as humans and individuals is the best thing anyone can do. Having tall people or even average height people speak for us is where we need to go because people don't take our word for it because they think we're just a group of people looking for entitlements. Same thing they used to say about Black people, same thing they say about women. It's the same. All of these discriminations, they have the same mechanics to them. There are so many similarities. That's what so stupid that we can't end them. It's the same game over and over again. How can you not see this coming?"

Brian and many of my participants ask for the recognition of the constraints of heightism that dictate the preconceptions of who tall and short people *are* and how we value them according to the stereotypes about their culture. Short and tall people are full persons whose bodies have myriad proportions that would no longer define their characters or futures.

APPENDIX: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Initial Questions

Tell me a little bit about yourself. (Probes: what you do, your education, where you grew up, what it was like growing up...)

Do you feel tall/short?

(If yes) What does it mean to you? In what ways has it shaped your identity?

How tall are you? How tall do other people think you are?

How have others reacted to your height?

What kind of language do you use to talk about your height? Others?

Tell me how being tall/short shapes your daily life.

Do you react or readjust how you behaved because of your height?

Do you think being tall/short has affected shopping for clothes?

Has your height affected your dating life?

(If yes) Tell me how.

Has your date or partner's height affected your relationship?

(If yes) Tell me how.

Height and Childhood

Were you a tall/short kid?

(If yes) What was it like to be a tall/short kid? Tell me a story about what it was like to be a tall/short kid.

(If no) When did you become tall/short in comparison to your peers?

When did you first think of yourself as tall/short?

What is your earliest memory of anything someone said about your height?

How did your family react to your height?

How did others react to your height when you were a kid?

How did you feel about your body when you were a kid? Do you think you felt differently about your body from how other girls/boys felt about their bodies?

(If yes) How?

In what ways do you think being tall/short affected your presentation of yourself as a kid? Did you react or readjust how you behaved because of your height?

Did you play sports growing up?

(If no) Did you feel pressure to play/not play sports?

(If yes) How important were sports in your life? Were sports important for your identity?

Height and Adolescence

How did it feel to be a tall/short girl/boy during your preteen years?

How did others react to your height when you were in middle or high school?

Did your height affect how you felt about your body during middle school?

Do you think you felt differently about your body from how other girls/boys felt about their bodies in middle school?

(If yes) How?

Did height affect your experience of puberty?

(If yes) In what ways?

Did you talk to your friends about body image?

(If yes) How did those conversations go? Was height a subject of conversation?
 In what ways do you think being tall/short affected your presentation of yourself as an adolescent? Did you react or readjust how you behaved because of your height?
 How did it feel to be a tall/short girl/boy while you were a teenager?
 How did others react to your height when you were in high school?
 Did your height affect how you felt about your body during high school?
 Do you think you felt differently about your body from how other girls/boys felt about their bodies in high school?
 In what ways do you think being tall/short affected your presentation of yourself as a teenager?
 Did you react or readjust how you behaved because of your height?
 Did your height ever affect your education?
 Did you go to any high school dances growing up?
(If yes) Do you think being tall/short affected those experiences?
 Were you interested in dating in high school?
(If yes) Did you?
(If yes) Did your height ever affect your dating experience?
 Is there anything you wish someone had said to you as a girl?

Height and Adulthood

Do you feel differently about being tall/short now than you did when you were younger?
 How do others react to your height now?
 Does being tall/short affect your feelings about being a woman/man?
 Has how you feel about your body changed from when you were younger? Do you think you feel differently now about your body from how other women and girls/men and boys feel about their bodies?
(If yes) How?
 In what ways do you think being tall/short affected your presentation of yourself now? Do you react or readjust how you behaved because of your height?
 Do you think being tall/short has affected shopping for clothes?
(If yes) Tell me a story about a time when being tall/short affected shopping for clothes.
 Do you think being tall/short has affected what kinds of clothes or shoes you wear?
(If yes) What are some examples?
 Has your height affected your dating life since you were a teenager?
(If yes) Tell me how.
 Has your date or partner's height affected your relationship?
(If yes) Tell me how.
 Are you in a relationship now?
(If yes) How tall is your partner? Does either of your height affect your relationship?
(If no) How tall would your ideal partner be?
 Did your height ever affect your career?
(If yes) How? Tell me about a time when your height affected your career.
 Do you think being tall/short has affected any other areas of your life?
 In what ways do you think your life would have been different if you were, say, 5'10"? What about 5'8"? What about 5'3"?
 Do you think women/men experience being tall/short differently than men/women experience being tall/short?

Do you think there are any interactions between a woman's/man's height and her/his sense of femininity/masculinity?

(If yes) Did you ever feel more or less feminine/masculine because of your height?

Do you think others perceive tall/short women/men to be more or less feminine/masculine?

(If yes) In what ways? Have you reacted to that in any ways?

Do you have an ideal height and weight for yourself?

(If yes) Would you mind sharing it with me?

Do you think other people are intimidated by your height?

(If yes) Tell me a story about a time when people were intimidated by your height.

Have you ever been intimidated by someone else's height?

Do you think there are interactions between height and power in our society?

(If yes) How so? Do you think that it's different for women and men?

Final Questions

Did you ever wish you were shorter/taller? Tell me a story about a time when you did.

Tell me a story about a time when you were glad to be tall/short.

Is there anything else important to you about your experiences being tall/short that we did not cover?

What was it like to be interviewed about this subject?

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